

Fact sheet

Hemochromatosis and Blood Donation Eligibility at Canadian Blood Services

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What is hemochromatosis?

Hereditary hemochromatosis is an inherited disorder of iron metabolism, where excess iron is absorbed from the diet. Eventually, the excess iron accumulates in tissues, such as the liver, pancreas, and heart. In advanced cases, damage to these organs occurs, with cirrhosis, diabetes and cardiac failure. Hemochromatosis is fairly common in people of northern European descent (approximately 1 in 300 people).

What is the treatment for hemochromatosis?

Since iron is an important component of hemoglobin, found in red blood cells, phlebotomy at regular intervals is the usual treatment for hemochromatosis. Depending on the amount of excess iron, phlebotomies may be done quite frequently initially (such as every week) and later on may be spaced out to maintain the iron level in the normal range (such as every 56 days).

Can individuals with hemochromatosis donate blood?

People with hemochromatosis can donate blood, providing they meet all other Canadian Blood Services donor eligibility criteria. Individuals with late complications from hemochromatosis (cirrhosis, diabetes requiring insulin, heart failure) are not eligible to donate.

How frequently can people with hemochromatosis donate?

Individuals with hemochromatosis can donate blood every 56 days for males and every 84 days for females, which is the usual interval for whole blood donation at Canadian Blood Services.

Individuals may have phlebotomies in between donations, providing there is at least one week between an outpatient phlebotomy and their next Canadian Blood Services donation. For example, if an individual has a phlebotomy this Monday in their outpatient clinic, they can donate blood at Canadian Blood Services the following Monday.

How can I learn about Canadian Blood Services donation criteria?

For the safety of donors and patients, all volunteer blood donors must be evaluated to find out if they are eligible to give blood. Blood donors must be in generally good health and feeling well, and all donors complete the same screening each time they donate. Final eligibility decisions



are made on the day of donation by staff at the blood donor clinic. For complete eligibility requirements, visit www.blood.ca/eligibility or call 1 888 2 DONATE (1-888-236-6283).

To find a blood donor clinic and book an appointment to donate, download the GiveBlood App or visit www.blood.ca.



Where can I find more information about hemochromatosis?

The Canadian Hemochromatosis Society has a helpful website at www.toomuchiron.ca.