Is there a screening test for vCJD?

Unfortunately no. Despite considerable effort there are no blood tests available for testing of donated blood. Efforts are on-going but it will likely be several years before any test might be available.

What are other countries doing to reduce the risk?

Blood Services all over the globe have taken steps to reduce the risk of transmission of this disease by transfusion. As in New Zealand, these involve exclusion of donors who are considered at increased risk through travel or transfusion.

The United Kingdom have taken dramatic steps to reduce their risk. Plasma collected from blood donations is now destroyed and anyone who has ever received a transfusion is prevented from donation.

Each country needs to carefully balance measures to reduce the risk against the impact these have on the ability to ensure sufficient blood is available for those patients who need it. There is no simple solution that suits all. NZBS will continue to monitor the international situation closely to ensure that appropriate measures are in place to protect New Zealand's blood supply.

If I am prevented from donating because of these measures, do you think I might get vCJD? Could I have passed it on to others with my previous donations?

You should not worry. The risk to any individual is very low indeed. We have introduced these measures on a precautionary basis whilst more evidence is gained about this disease. There is no reason for you to be concerned about your own health.

To give blood you must be in good health, weigh at least 50 kgs* and be 16-65 years of age.

*First time donors under 25 years of age must also meet the height and weight criteria.

Epsom Donor Centre
71 Great South Road, Epsom 09 523 5733

North Shore Donor Centre
441 Lake Road, Takapuna 09 489 8858

Manukau Donor Centre
Unit B, 116 Cavendish Drive 09 263 4667

Tauranga Donor Centre
154-168 Cameron Road 07 578 2194

Hamilton Donor Centre
Gate 1, Waikato Hospital, 21 Ohaupo Road 07 839 3679

Palmerston North Donor Centre
Gate 12, 50 Ruahine Street, Roslyn 06 350 0963

Wellington Donor Centre
Hospital Road, Newtown 04 380 2243

Christchurch Donor Centre
15 Lester Lane, Addington 03 343 9040

Dunedin Donor Centre
170 Crawford Street, Dunedin 03 477 9920

To donate, contact us today to book your appointment

0800 448 325 nzblood.co.nz
Can CJD be transmitted by transfusion?

Considerable research has provided reassurance that the risk of acquiring classical CJD by transfusion is very low, in fact, too low to be measured.

The UK authorities closely followed a small group of patients who received blood components from donors who subsequently developed vCJD. A number of these patients have developed evidence of vCJD infection. This cluster of cases indicates that vCJD must be considered as a transfusion transmissible infection.

What is NZBS doing to reduce the risk that vCJD might be passed on by transfusion in New Zealand?

NZBS closely monitors developments relating to vCJD and the actions taken by other international blood services.

- In 2000 NZBS introduced measures to prevent people who had been resident in the United Kingdom for a cumulative period of 6 months or more between 1980 and 1996 from donating blood. 1 in 10 active blood donors in New Zealand were lost by this measure. This is now standard international practice.
- In 2001 NZBS introduced new systems to remove the white cells from donated blood prior to transfusion. This is known as ‘Universal Leucodepletion’. The UK also introduced this. None of the cases of transfusion associated disease in the UK to date have received leucodepleted blood components.
- In 2003 NZBS introduced a measure whereby people who had received a transfusion in the United Kingdom since 1980 were prevented from donating blood.
- In April 2006 NZBS introduced additional measures based on concerns relating to the increasing number of cases of vCJD reported in France and Ireland.

The measures reflect those introduced earlier relating to travel/residency and transfusion in the United Kingdom.

The current policies applied by NZBS mean that prospective donors who have

1. visited or lived in the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, Isle of Man and the Channel Islands) or in France or in the Republic of Ireland between 1st January 1980 and 31st December 1996 for a total period of 6 months or longer, are permanently deferred from donating blood in New Zealand.

2. received a blood transfusion in the United Kingdom, France or the Republic of Ireland since 1980 are permanently deferred from donating blood in New Zealand.

NZBS estimates that about 0.25% of current donors were lost by these new measures.

What if I lived in one of these countries before 1980 or after 1996, can I continue to donate?

Yes you can, provided you have not received a transfusion of blood there since 1980. The scientific data clearly shows that BSE was not a problem prior to 1980. By 1996 the UK and other European authorities had significantly tightened their food regulations to remove the risk of food borne transmission to humans.

Who made the decision to introduce these new measures?

In 2002 NZBS established a working group to provide advice on transfusion associated vCJD issues. The working group included New Zealand experts on vCJD and BSE along with relevant stakeholders (clinicians and patient groups). The working group met on a number of occasions. Current NZBS policies in this area are based on recommendations developed by the working group.