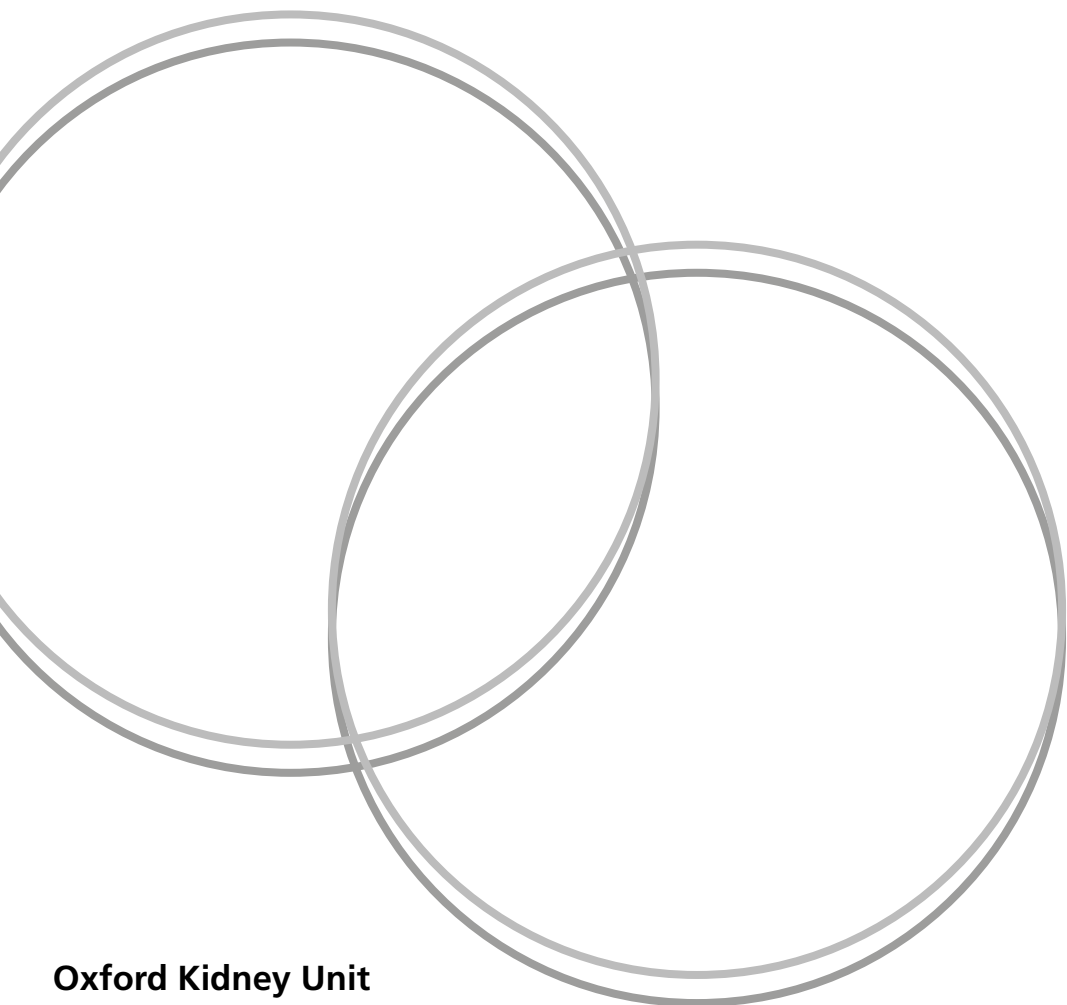


# **Risks of exposure to blood borne viruses when on dialysis**

**Information for patients**



This leaflet has been written to tell you about the risks of blood borne viruses. This information is important, because you have chronic kidney disease and may be starting dialysis in the future.

If you are dependant on haemodialysis to treat kidney failure, you may be exposed to blood during your treatment. This increases the risk of being infected by a blood borne virus. If you also travel abroad and have dialysis, you may be more at risk of picking up these viruses.

If you are on peritoneal dialysis your dialysis treatment does not put you at risk of a blood borne virus.

In addition, if you have chronic kidney disease you will be more prone to infection.

## **What are blood borne viruses?**

Blood borne viruses include the hepatitis B virus, hepatitis C virus and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). These can cause serious illnesses, such as liver disease or AIDS. They can also stay in the body for a long time without causing symptoms. They are usually passed from one person to another by contact with body fluids, especially blood.

# How could I have been exposed to a blood borne virus?

This could have been:

- by having sex with an infected person
- by receiving a blood product transfusion of infected blood (this is very unlikely in the UK, as blood products are screened for these viruses)
- by sharing needles or syringes if using intravenous drugs
- from receiving injected drugs or blood from needles which have not been properly sterilised (in the UK all needles used in hospitals are sterilised and are only used for one person then thrown away)
- from having tattoos or body piercing in an unsterile environment.

Some countries carry a higher risk of infection; your Renal Unit will advise you on this.

## What routine testing is done?

Your kidney or transplant doctor or nurse will organise for you to have a blood test before you start dialysis. Your blood will be tested for HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C. This is known as a blood borne virus test.

When you start haemodialysis your blood will be tested on a regular basis. Your blood can be collected while you are on the dialysis machine. Your dialysis nurse will let you know when these tests are done and what your results are. Blood borne virus tests are also required before we discuss the option of a kidney transplant.

When you travel to another haemodialysis unit you will need to have the virus test taken before you go and when you return. The risk of exposure to a virus in a UK dialysis unit is very low, but the risk is higher if you have haemodialysis treatment abroad.

## **What happens if I don't want to have the tests?**

We will only do the tests if you agree. You would still have the dialysis treatment you need.

As we have to protect everyone from virus infection, if you do not want to have the tests we would then assume that you could possibly carry a virus. Your haemodialysis treatment would need to be separate from other patients, in a single room. Other haemodialysis units (such as on holiday) will not accept you for dialysis. You would also not be able to receive a kidney transplant.

## **What would happen if the tests were positive for a virus?**

For most people the chance of a positive test is very low. However, if you do have a positive result you would still receive the dialysis treatment you need. You would need to have haemodialysis in a single room, to reduce the chance of you passing the virus to other patients on dialysis. Your doctor may refer you to a specialist for treatment of the virus.

## **Why does this matter to people with kidney failure?**

In the past, spread of blood borne viruses has been a problem in haemodialysis units, but this is now rare in the UK because of the precautions that we take.

# How is the risk of infection reduced?

- Everyone who might need dialysis treatment should be vaccinated to prevent hepatitis B infection. This is part of Government guidance.

You should ideally be vaccinated before starting dialysis; your predialysis nurse will arrange this when you are in the low clearance clinic. If you start dialysis suddenly you will still be vaccinated. This will be done on the haemodialysis unit if you are starting haemodialysis, or in the peritoneal dialysis unit if you are starting peritoneal dialysis.

If you are on haemodialysis or peritoneal dialysis, your dialysis unit will check your hepatitis B antibody levels (with a blood test) once a year. You may need a booster vaccination to increase the level of antibodies in your blood.

- After being used, all haemodialysis machines are disinfected internally using heat to kill viruses. The outside of the machines, beds and other equipment are also cleaned thoroughly between each patient.
- The use of hand gel by clinicians between each patient has also reduced the risk of infection. The dialysis nurses will also wear protective clothing, such as gloves, aprons and eye protection.

# Information for using haemodialysis facilities abroad

Before you go on holiday, your haemodialysis nurse will retest your blood for viruses. They will need to tell the haemodialysis unit you are visiting the results. You will not need to do this if you are on peritoneal dialysis.

## What happens when I return home from holiday?

Your dialysis nurse will talk to you about your holiday and the risk of catching a blood borne virus.

Depending on the level of risk, you may need haemodialysis in a single room. As the number of single rooms is limited on the haemodialysis units, we may need to change your dialysis appointment time. Your dialysis nurse will talk to you about this.

Your dialysis nurse will send a sample of your blood to be tested for all blood borne viruses. The result takes about a week to be completed. Your dialysis nurse will let you know the result.

Your blood will be tested again each month for the next 3 months. You will have your dialysis in the single room until all the tests are complete. You will also be allocated your own machine during this time.

# Where can I find more information?

Your doctor, renal nurse or dialysis nurse will answer any questions you may have.

There is also information available from the **Department of Health**.

Website: [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/382207/good\\_practice\\_guidelines\\_renal\\_dialysis\\_transplantation.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/382207/good_practice_guidelines_renal_dialysis_transplantation.pdf)

## **NHS website**

Information here about hepatitis B and C.

Website: [www.nhs.uk/conditions/hepatitis-b](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/hepatitis-b)  
[www.nhs.uk/conditions/Hepatitis-C/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Hepatitis-C/)

## **Six Counties Kidney Patients Association**

The SCKPA is run for patients by patients or family members.

They offer support to people suffering from kidney disease or who are on dialysis. They work closely with the Oxford Kidney Unit and have branches in Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire, and Milton Keynes, and parts of Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Berkshire.

Website: [www.sixcountieskpa.org.uk](http://www.sixcountieskpa.org.uk)

## **Oxford Kidney Unit**

Lots of information about the Oxford Kidney Unit for patients and carers.

Website: [www.ouh.nhs.uk/oku](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/oku)

If you need an interpreter or would like this information leaflet in another format, such as Easy Read, large print, Braille, audio, electronically or another language, please speak to the department where you are being seen. You will find their contact details on your appointment letter.

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[www.ouh.nhs.uk/information](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/information)

