Donating blood

If you are 16-17 years old

You need parental consent every time you give blood in WA or QLD. This document contains frequently asked questions, information about giving blood, and the Parental Consent Form, which must be completed and signed by a parent or legal guardian giving permission for you to give blood.

**Frequently asked questions from 16-17 year old donors**

**When can I start donating blood?**

Once you turn 16 years of age.

**How often can I donate?**

Until you turn 18, you can donate once every 12 months. After your 18th birthday, you may be able to donate once every 12 weeks. Because you are still growing, the extra time between donations is to make sure your body has time to replace and build up its stores of iron.

**What does parental consent mean for me?**

To give blood in Western Australia and Queensland, the State Government requires a parent to give written permission every time you donate.

In order to fulfil this requirement, your mother, father, step-parent or legal guardian (but not a carer or teacher) will need to sign the Australian Red Cross Blood Service Parental Consent Form. The form reflects your parent’s permission for you to give blood. Relevant legislation provides that a parent may consent if a medical practitioner advises that the removal is not likely to be prejudicial to your health. It is open to your parent as to how this advice is obtained, in consultation with a medical practitioner.

This Parental Consent Form can only be signed by one of your parents and is a part of the regular pre-donation process for all 16 and 17 year old donors in your state. Please note this form is only valid for three months from the date of signing.

**Can I just get my parents to write a note?**

No, it has to be the Blood Service Parental Consent Form to ensure the consent meets the State Government requirements.

**Where do I get the Parental Consent Form from?**

The form is on page 4 of this document and is perforated for your convenience. Or, you can:

- call 13 14 95 and ask to have one emailed or posted to you.

**Is it safe for me to give blood?**

Yes, it is safe for you to donate blood if you are healthy and eligible. You will still be assessed against strict safety criteria by the Blood Service before you give blood.

**Can I email the form?**

No, for the Parental Consent Form to be valid it has to be printed, signed by a parent and brought with you in hard copy.

**I’m in a boarding school, and want to donate during school term. What can I do?**

Discuss this with your parents and where appropriate ask them to send a signed Parental Consent Form to you so you are able to bring it with you when you give blood.

**What if I bring it later?**

Unfortunately you can’t give blood if you don’t have a signed Parental Consent Form with you each time you come in.

For further information call 13 14 95 or visit donateblood.com.au

Please turn over
Frequently asked questions (continued)

What if I can’t get a parent to sign the Parental Consent Form?
Unfortunately under the legislation you can’t give blood if you don’t have the signed Parental Consent Form.

Can anyone else sign the Parental Consent Form?
(Teacher/master/grandparent/coordinator/older sibling, etc.)
No. Only a parent, step-parent or legal guardian can sign the Parental Consent Form. If any other adult or guardian signs it you won’t be able to donate.

But what if I don’t have parents or my parents are not legally responsible for me?
Please contact us on 13 14 95 to discuss.

Is giving blood worth all this effort?
Yes! Every donation helps to save three lives. Australia needs over 25,000 blood donations each week – yet only 1 in 30 of us gives blood. So although getting the form signed every time may be complicated, we hope you’ll continue to give for the many people who need your help every day.

Information about donating blood

Blood donation is extremely safe
However, problems can occasionally happen during or after a donation. These problems are uncommon, but we require you to read this information so that, if they do occur, you will know what to do.

Please note: all equipment used in blood collection is sterile, used once only and then discarded.
If you experience any concerns or are feeling anxious ask a staff member for assistance.

Feeling faint and fainting
Fainting is caused by a reflex which slows your pulse and lowers your blood pressure for a short time.
A very small number of blood donors, about 1 in 100, may feel faint (dizzy, light-headed, hot, sweaty or unwell) during or straight after their donation. A much smaller number, about 1 in 1000, actually faint (lose consciousness).

Some donors may also feel faint or faint after leaving the blood donor centre.

Reducing the chance of fainting
In the 24 hours before you donate:
• Drink plenty of fluids, especially in warm weather.

In the 3 hours before you donate:
• Drink 3 good-sized glasses of water/juice.
• Have something to eat something – savoury and salty foods are best.
• Avoid strenuous exercise.

While you are in the centre:
• Drink one glass of water prior to donating.
• If you usually have low blood pressure and feel faint when you stand up suddenly, please tell us before you donate.
• During your donation, tense and relax your inner thigh and abdominal muscles to help maintain an optimal blood flow – ask a staff member for more information.
• Spend at least 15 to 20 minutes in the refreshment area after donating and have a cool drink to allow your blood volume to adjust.
Information about donating blood (continued)

For the 6 hours after you leave:
• Keep drinking plenty of cool fluids.
• Avoid hot drinks.
• Avoid standing for long periods.
• Do not rush or do strenuous exercise or have a hot shower.

What to do if you feel faint
Do not drive for at least 6 hours after you have recovered.
Immediately sit or lie down as flat as possible to avoid falling, then:
• If you are still in the donor centre, tell a staff member.
• Stay lying down for around 30 minutes or until you feel well again.
• While lying down, tense your inner thigh and abdominal muscles for 5 seconds, then relax. Repeat this 5 times a minute for 5 minutes.
• Sit up for at least 5 minutes before you stand up.
• Drink plenty of cool fluids (at least 2 glasses) and have a savoury snack before you leave the donor centre.
• Do not drive for at least 6 hours after you’ve recovered because there is a risk that you may faint while you are driving.

If you feel faint while driving, slow down and stop the car as soon as it is safe to do so. Remain in the car, and lay your seat as flat as possible.

Do not get out of your car as fainting beside a road can be dangerous. Do not attempt to drive again. Call 000 for an ambulance.

Bruising and bleeding
Small bruises at the needle site are not unusual, but generally cause very few problems and disappear within a week. Larger bruises or bleeding from the needle site are rare.

To reduce the risk of bruising and bleeding at the needle site:
• Avoid using your donation arm to eat and drink while at the donor centre.
• Be careful when putting on a jacket after donating.
• Avoid lifting or carrying anything with your donation arm for 30 minutes.
• Keep the bandage on your arm for 2 hours.
• Minimise heavy lifting for 24 hours.

If you develop a bruise that causes discomfort, an icepack and/or a mild pain reliever such as paracetamol may help (do not use aspirin or other anti-inflammatory medication like ibuprofen). Always wrap ice or ice packs in cloth and apply for a maximum of 20 minutes at a time, 3-4 times a day.

If you start bleeding from the needle site, apply pressure and lift your arm above your shoulder, keeping your elbow straight, for 15 minutes.

Please phone the Blood Service on 13 14 95 if you have any bleeding or bruising so we can help.

Iron levels and blood donation
Your red blood cells are rich in iron, which means blood donation results in iron loss. If the amount of iron in your body falls too low, you may become iron deficient. This may lead to:
• Tiredness and/or difficulty concentrating.
• Low haemoglobin levels (anaemia).

Before donating, you’ll be given a haemoglobin screening test. This is not a direct measure of iron levels so does not detect all cases of iron deficiency, but it ensures we do not take blood from you if you have a low haemoglobin level. If your haemoglobin is below our guidelines, we’ll need to delay your donation and may refer you to your doctor.

To help replace the iron loss associated with donation, and prevent iron deficiency and anaemia, we recommend you have a healthy dietary intake of iron-rich foods. This may not be sufficient for all donors, especially teenagers and women of childbearing age.

If you are trying to become pregnant you should try to build and maintain healthy iron stores to support the increased iron requirements of pregnancy.

If you have concerns about your iron levels or would like further information, talk to a staff member and/or your general practitioner.

You can also find more information in our brochure Why iron and haemoglobin are important.

Uncommon events
• Nerve irritation – sometimes the donation needle may irritate a nerve. This may cause pain which is normally only momentary. If any pain persists please advise a staff member immediately. Pressure on a nerve may also cause temporary numbness of the forearm.
• Needle inserted into an artery – if this happens the needle will be removed and pressure applied.
• Infection or formation of a blood clot (thrombosis) – this may lead to redness, tenderness or swelling.
• Increase in pulse rate or a sensation of tightness or pain in the chest.

If you have any of these symptoms or other concerns whilst in the donor centre, please let a staff member know immediately. If you develop symptoms after leaving the donor centre and require urgent medical attention, go to a hospital or see a doctor so the problem can be assessed.

If you’re not sure whether you should seek medical attention, please call us on 13 14 95 for advice. If you do see a doctor, please call and let us know the outcome.
Parental consent form

WA/QLD at every donation

Thank you for providing consent for your child to give blood. Every donation is essential in providing life-saving blood for the Australian community. The greatest need for blood typically comes from cancer and leukaemia patients, surgery and emergencies.

It is safe for your child to give blood if they are healthy and eligible. At the Blood Service our priority is the health and wellbeing of all people. Accordingly, we have in place guidelines designed to safeguard the health of both our donors and the recipient of their generous gifts.

In the interests of donor safety, Blood Service staff assess all donors against strict safety criteria by the Blood Service prior to donating. This assessment is not medical advice but rather an assessment of eligibility to donate.

All whole blood donations are tested for the presence of hepatitis B, hepatitis C, HIV (the AIDS virus), HTLV (human T-lymphotropic virus) and syphilis. If your child’s blood proves positive for any of these conditions, or for any reason shows a significantly abnormal result, your child will be informed. Your child would be referred to a GP/specialist and encouraged to discuss the result with you.

If your child is 16 or 17 years of age and wishes to donate in Western Australia or Queensland, you must complete this section prior to every blood donation.

Declaration

Please complete in black or blue pen only

I, (full name of parent) ..................................................................................... confirm that I have obtained advice from a medical practitioner that blood donation should not be prejudicial to the health of the child.

I give consent for

(donor surname/family name) ......................................................... (donor given name) ........................................ to give blood.

Relationship to donor (mother, father, step-parent or legal guardian) ...........................................................................................

Your address ............................................................................................. State .......................... Postcode ..........................

Home ( ) .......................... .......................... .......................... Business ( ) .......................... ..........................

Mobile .......................... .......................... ..........................

MINIMUM AGE FOR BLOOD DONATION INCREASING TO 18

The minimum age for whole blood donation in Australia is currently 16 years. However, we’re now in the process of transitioning to a minimum age of 18 years. The new policy will come into effect on 14 January 2018 and will apply to both new and existing donors.

While donors aged 16 and 17 remain eligible to donate before the policy comes into effect, the Blood Service recommends they postpone any further donations until after they turn 18.

We have provided information on the upcoming policy change below, which you should consider and discuss with your child. If, after considering this information and the information within the Parental Consent form, you consent to your child making a donation before the policy comes into effect, you must complete both forms. Your child must bring these forms with them to their appointment.

About the policy change

Looking after the health and wellbeing of our donors is a priority that underpins the decisions we make as an organisation.

In 2014 the Blood Service increased the donation interval from 12 weeks to one year for donors aged 16 and 17 years. This was based on Blood Service research that indicated younger donors have lower iron stores. This change allowed younger donors more time to replace their iron after donation.

A recent international study has confirmed our earlier findings and has provided us with sufficient evidence to suggest a further policy change is appropriate.

The new policy will ensure that younger donors aren’t losing iron through blood donation at a critical time in their growth and development.

The Blood Service is confident that this change can be made without impacting our ability to secure Australia’s blood supply.

If you would like more information please visit donateblood.com.au/age-change or contact us on 13 14 95.

Declaration

Please complete in black or blue pen only

I, (full name of parent) ................................................... confirm that I have read and understood the information on the upcoming policy change increasing the minimum age for whole blood donation to 18 years.

I give consent for (full name of donor) .................................................... to give blood.

Signature ........................................................... Date  D M Y

For further information call 13 14 95 or visit donateblood.com.au
Aren’t iron levels checked prior to donation? Why can’t you tell if a donor has enough iron to donate?

We test the donor’s haemoglobin level before each donation. This is an important screening test to ensure the haemoglobin level is sufficient for them to donate. Haemoglobin levels will drop when iron stores become considerably depleted, but they are not a good measure of iron levels. It is possible to have low iron levels and a normal haemoglobin level. There is currently no suitable testing device available to measure iron levels immediately prior to donation. The Blood Service continues to investigate options for measuring iron stores prior to donation.

Could donating have affected the health of youth donors?

Every time a donor donates whole blood, they are donating iron-rich red blood cells. Because young people are still growing, they have higher requirements for iron. The body replaces iron lost through donation by absorbing more iron from the diet. There is considerable variation in how long donors take to replace this iron – this will depend on the type and amount of iron in the diet, and whether there are other iron losses (for example, through menstruation). We recommend that donors who are concerned about their iron levels, consult their doctor.

Will you be contacting donors when they turn 18, to make their next appointment?

We will not be contacting donors individually when they turn 18. They will need to contact the Blood Service to make an appointment. Appointments can be scheduled for three months in advance, and, subject to meeting standard eligibility criteria, donors will be able to give blood the day they've turned 18.

How can youth donors stay involved with the Blood Service?

Participating in volunteering opportunities with the Australian Red Cross is a valuable and rewarding way to help those in need. Anyone too young to donate blood themselves can support the work of the Blood Service by raising awareness of the value of blood donation and encouraging friends and family over the age of 18 to donate. For more information, visit redcross.org.au/volunteering.

My child donates with a Red25 group. What does this mean for the group?

The group will still remain open so that parents, teachers and friends donations can still add to the tally if they are over 18. After you turn 18 you can still have your donations go towards the groups tally.

Why are younger donors being targeted? Don’t all donors lose iron with a whole blood donation?

Because young people require more iron to support their growth and development, they generally have lower iron levels and may take longer to replenish the iron lost with a whole blood donation. Looking after the health and wellbeing of donors is a key priority of the Blood Service. Hence our decision to raise the minimum age for whole blood donation to 18.

Can my child donate if they have good iron levels and have a letter from their doctor?

No. As of 14 January 2018, donors under 18 years of age will be unable to donate. The policy change is being introduced in the interests of ensuring donor health and wellbeing.

Please visit donateblood.com.au/age-change or contact us on 13 14 95.