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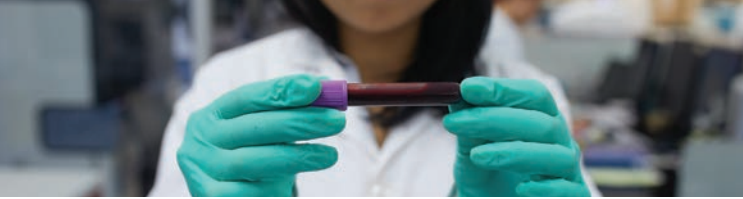
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ALL ABOUT

Rare Donor Programme





What is a rare blood type?

Your blood contains red blood cells. On the surface of those cells are sugar and protein substances called “antigens”. Someone has rare blood if they lack common antigens on the red cells or a combination of several more common antigens. This makes the blood unique. Due to certain illnesses or compatibility issues following multiple transfusions, certain patients may need blood from rare donors, because they have produced red cell antibodies. Others are due to an inherited rare antigen typing and require a more specific match. A rare blood donor occurs in 1:100 or 1:1000 or even less.

Rare donors in the Western Cape

The Western Cape Blood Service (WCBS) currently has a panel of rare donors. The blood donations of these rare donors are stored in a frozen state. Both Blood Services in South Africa have access to this source of rare blood.

WCBS aims to increase our panel of rare donors for use nationally and internationally. This is especially important considering our diverse population. Therefore, the Service is currently extending its testing methods to include DNA testing as an additional tool to identify rare blood types and increase the number of donors on our rare donor panel.

The International Rare Blood Donor Programme

When a patient needs rare blood for a transfusion, time is of the essence. Finding rare blood is however a time consuming and difficult process.

In aid of this, the International Panel of Rare Blood Donors was established in 1965 by the International Society of Blood Transfusion (ISBT). The day to day running is assigned to the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) International Blood Group Reference Laboratory (IBGRL) in Bristol, UK.

The role of the IBGRL is to compile information on rare donors that have been identified at blood donation centres around the world and to make this information available when rare blood is needed. Requests for rare blood are internationally co-ordinated when required.

To learn more about the International Rare Donor Programme, please contact WCBS or visit the ISBT website at www.isbtweb.org.

How the process works

When the local Blood Service is not able to provide the rare blood required for a patient, a search is carried out nationally and if the blood type is not sourced, the International Panel of Rare Blood Donors is contacted to search their database for rare donors whose blood type matches that of the patient.

Once a match is found, the Blood Service is asked to send rare stored blood, or if not available, contact the rare blood donor to donate as soon as possible. If a rare blood donor must be called to come in to donate, time is needed to collect, test and transport the blood.

Why we need YOU

Blood types are inherited and because of this, a person with a rare blood type may have family members with that same rare blood type. If you are identified as a rare blood donor, please encourage your family members to donate blood. The chances are one in four that the siblings of a person with a rare blood type will have the same rare blood type.

Each unit of rare blood can be frozen in long-term storage facilities for up to ten years, so it will be available for patients when required.