

How to decide whether a child can safely donate blood-forming cells to a family member

What were researchers trying to do?

The Worldwide Network for Blood and Marrow Transplantation recommends ways to decide whether a child should donate blood-forming cells, also called stem cells, to a sick family member.

Transplant experts explain that a child can be a donor for a sick family member. But the child may not understand what will happen and can't legally consent. That's why doctors and parents should take special care to keep the child safe.

What did they recommend?

A child who might donate should:

- **Get a health screening** from a doctor who is not caring for their sick family member.
- **Have an advocate**, a person who focuses on the risks and benefits to the child who might donate, rather than just the sick family member or the family as a whole.
- **Be protected from emotional harm**. If the child has a very bad relationship with the sick family member, they should not donate.
- **Be able to join a research study** if the research makes donation safer or better, or if it helps the sick family member without putting the child at risk.
- **Be healthy enough to donate**.

Important Point:

Experts make recommendations to help doctors and parents protect children who might donate blood-forming cells to a sick family member.

Why is this important?

Parents and doctors want to take care of the sick family member and the child who might donate. Often the sick family member and child who might donate are siblings (brothers / sisters). When the parents and doctors are focused on the sick family member, these recommendations can help them carefully consider the risks and benefits specific to the child who might donate.

What else should I keep in mind about this study?

Children have donated bone marrow to their family members for more than 40 years. And they have donated peripheral blood stem cells (PBSC) for more than 15 years. These are very safe procedures. Children can almost always safely donate blood-forming cells. And donation may help their sick family member and their family as a whole. But doctors and parents must also protect the child who might donate. If the child might be harmed physically or emotionally by the donation, they should not donate.

Questions to ask your doctor

If your child might be a donor for a family member, ask your doctor:

- Who will be the advocate for my child?
- What are the possible risks and benefits for my child who might donate?

Learn more about

- [This research study](#)
- [Donating blood or marrow](#)
- [HLA matching](#)

Source:

Bitan M, van Walraven SM, Worel N, et al. Determination of eligibility in related pediatric hematopoietic cell donors: ethical and clinical considerations. Recommendations from a working group of the Worldwide Network for Blood and Marrow Transplantation Association. *Biology of Blood and Marrow Transplantation*. 2016 Jan 1; 22(1):96-103. Epub 2015 Aug 22.

About this research summary

Ground-breaking research into blood and marrow transplant is happening every day. That research is having a significant impact on the survival and quality of life of thousands of transplant patients. But the research is written by scientists for scientists. By providing research news in an easy-to-understand way, patients, caregivers, and families have access to useful information that can help them make treatment decisions.

This information is provided on behalf of the Consumer Advocacy Committee of the CIBMTR[®] (Center for International Blood and Marrow Transplant Research[®]). The CIBMTR is a research collaboration between the National Marrow Donor Program[®]/Be The Match[®] and the Medical College of Wisconsin.

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