

Blood Transfusions May Cause Lung Damage

The FDA has issued a health alert warning that people who receive blood products, particularly plasma-containing products, may be at risk for developing transfusion-related acute lung injury (TRALI). This serious pulmonary syndrome may lead to death if not recognized and treated appropriately.

TRALI can occur when white blood cell antibodies in the donor's blood react with the recipient's white blood cells, causing a change in the lung tissue that allows fluid to enter. Most donors implicated in TRALI reactions are women with more than two children or donors who have had multiple transfusions. If not treated immediately and appropriately, TRALI may cause respiratory or breathing problems that can lead to death.

The FDA's Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research (CBER) has received reports of more than 45 TRALI-related deaths since the early 1990s. The condition is a leading cause of transfusion-related death.

Symptoms of TRALI include fever, shortness of breath, and a drop in blood pressure. X-rays often show the recipient's lungs as completely white. Symptoms typically begin one to two hours after a transfusion, but may be delayed up to six hours. Health-care professionals should be alert that any respiratory distress or breathing problems during or following a blood transfusion could be caused by TRALI.

Deaths from TRALI must be reported to CBER according to FDA regulations.

The FDA encourages voluntary reporting of non-fatal TRALI reactions. Reports can be filed via the FDA's MedWatch reporting program, by phone at 1-800-FDA-1088; by fax at 1-800-FDA-0178; by e-mail at www.fda.gov/medwatch/how.htm; or by mail at MedWatch, HF-2, 5600 Fishers Lane, Rockville, MD 20852.

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