

Clinical trial approved to help the NHS treat COVID-19 patients using plasma

- A clinical trial has been given approval to determine if plasma donated by patients who have recovered from COVID-19 can help those battling the illness
- If effective, a scaled-up national programme will deliver up to 10,000 units of convalescent plasma per week to the NHS
- This would provide enough convalescent plasma to treat 5,000 patients each week

Up to 5,000 severely ill patients with COVID-19 could soon be treated each week with plasma from those who have recovered from the illness as part of a new approach to treating the virus.

The national randomised clinical trial will help to determine if plasma collected from donors who have recovered from COVID-19, known as 'convalescent plasma', is an effective treatment for patients who are severely unwell with the illness. Plasma from recovered COVID-19 patients can be transfused to patients who are struggling to produce their own antibodies against the virus.

In parallel with the trial, the government is scaling up the national programme for collecting plasma so the treatment can be widely rolled out if it is shown to be effective. The collection of plasma would be ramped up over April and May to deliver up to 10,000 units of plasma to the NHS every week, enough to treat 5,000 COVID-19 patients per week.

Matt Hancock, Health and Social Care Secretary, said:

This global pandemic is the biggest public health emergency this generation has faced and we are doing absolutely everything we can to beat it.

The UK has world-leading life sciences and research sectors and I have every hope this treatment will be a major milestone in our fight against this disease.

Hundreds of people are participating in national trials already for potential treatments and the scaling up of convalescent plasma collection means thousands could potentially benefit from it in the future.

Professor Jonathan Van Tam, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, said:

The UK is leading the world's largest trials to find a treatment for COVID-19, with over 7,000 people so far involved testing a range of medicines; we hope to add convalescent plasma to this list shortly.

Convalescent plasma has been used as an effective treatment for emerging infections in the past, and this step forward underpins our science-backed approach to fighting this virus.

Dr Gail Mifflin, Chief Medical Officer, NHS Blood and Transplant, said:

As well as continuing to collect enough blood throughout this outbreak, we are also heavily involved in the national research response including major trials of this potential treatment.

We are rapidly building our capability to collect plasma so that we can quickly move into supplying hospitals at scale, should the proposed trial demonstrate patient benefit.

Northern Ireland Health Minister, Robin Swann MLA, said:

Two of the greatest strengths of the UK as we face this emergency are our world-leading health research capacity and the selflessness of our citizens.

The Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service and the wider Health and Social Care family are working with their colleagues across the UK to progress and participate in clinical trials on COVID-19.

Minister for Public Health in Scotland, Joe FitzPatrick, said:

The potential for convalescent plasma to aid those suffering from COVID-19 has to be confirmed through clinical trials. I am delighted to see the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service (SNBTS) and Scottish donors will be playing a key part.

The wellbeing of donors, recipients and staff is a priority so there are strict conditions to protect everyone participating in the trial.

It is also important to recognise that this means that not everyone who recovers from Covid-19 will be able to donate.

Welsh Government Health Minister, Vaughan Gething, said:

I'm very pleased to see clinical trials are now underway and to see

Wales sharing expertise with the other UK nations on this programme. It has the potential to significantly improve patient recovery and save lives.

Plasma taken from recovered patients contains antibodies that recognise the virus and can reduce its growth. We will be using plasma from patients at least 28 days after recovery as by that time, antibody levels will have increased.

NHS Blood and Transplant will contact people in England who have recovered from confirmed COVID-19 infection and could be a possible plasma donor, and the plasma will be collected at their centres. Blood will be taken from donors from one arm, which is circulated through a machine that separates out the plasma, and returned into the other arm. The process takes about 45 minutes and provides 2 units of plasma per donation, which can also be frozen and stored ahead for any future need.

Convalescent plasma was used as an effective treatment during the SARS outbreak.

If people have a confirmed positive test result and they are willing to donate, they can also provide details to us through [NHSBT's website](#).

- DHSC is working in collaboration with NHS Blood and Transplant and the other UK blood services, Public Health England and NHS Digital to deliver the programme.
- Ongoing national clinical trial as part of REMAP-CAP – with the possibility of another trial later on if the results of the first trial are shown effective will investigate whether transfusions may improve a patient's speed of recovery and chances of survival.
- We will be prioritising donors who are best placed to help so there may be a short delay in responding to some people.