

Updates on blood donor screening policies on Variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (mad cow disease) and malaria

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

To safeguard blood safety from Variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (mad cow disease) and malaria, the Hong Kong Red Cross Blood Transfusion Service (BTS) is implementing measures to defer or decline those who may have or had contracted the diseases. The Hospital Authority (BTS) Expert Panel on Blood and Blood Products Safety (Expert Panel) has been closely monitoring the international trends and guidelines of the diseases. With reference to related medical literature and data on mad cow disease and malaria in Hong Kong, the Expert Panel approved the following updates on blood donor screening policies effective from tomorrow (September 15):

Variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (mad cow disease)

Those who have resided in Europe for five or more years are now eligible to donate blood, except:

- those who had spent three or more months cumulatively in the UK between January 1, 1980, to December 31, 1996;
- those who had spent five or more years cumulatively in France or Ireland between January 1, 1980, to December 31, 2001; and
- those who have received a blood transfusion in the UK, France or Ireland between January 1, 1980, and the present.

Malaria

The deferral period for those who have travelled to malaria-endemic areas is shortened from one year to three months. For information on malaria-endemic countries and areas, please refer to:

www.cdc.gov/malaria/travelers/country_table/a.html or
www.who.int/malaria/publications/country-profiles/en/.

The spokesperson for BTS emphasised that the updates have been made following careful assessment and thorough consideration of associated risks on blood safety by the Expert Panel. The Expert Panel will remain vigilant and review related policies in a timely manner. For details of the above-mentioned screening policies, please visit the BTS' website: www5.ha.org.hk/rcbts/news/news20200914?lang=en. Prospective blood donors who have enquiries regarding the updates can call the donor centre and speak to a nursing staff member when planning a blood donation.