



# News Release

For Immediate Release

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## Blood Is Safe but Concerns Raised about Blood Plasma Supply Risk: Auditor General

(TORONTO) Ontarians have a safe and largely reliable and secure supply of blood. However, there are growing concerns about the increasing reliance on internationally sourced blood plasma—the main component required to manufacture one particular blood product that patients rely on for life-saving treatments, says Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk in her *2020 Annual Report* released today.

Canadian Blood Services (CBS), a national not-for-profit organization that was established in 1998, has delivered on providing a safe blood supply, with no confirmed cases of blood-borne infections of HIV, hepatitis B or hepatitis C resulting from a blood transfusion since the early 2000s. But the COVID-19 pandemic has magnified existing weaknesses in the reliability of the supply of immunoglobulins, a blood product with growing demand. For the purposes of producing this blood product, CBS collected 13.7% of blood plasma from domestic sources in 2019/20, which fell far below its own goal of 50%.

Hospitals in Ontario obtain their blood components and products from CBS. The audit found the Ministry of Health currently does not gather necessary information about the growing demand for blood components and products used by Ontario hospitals. As well, hospitals are not required to report to CBS the quantities of blood products they use and CBS does not collect information on what medical conditions physicians use blood products to treat—for example, whether for preferred uses, as defined in provincial guidelines, or not.

“The collection of this information from hospitals would help better forecast future supply needs, which is particularly important given the delays in surgeries as a result of COVID-19,” Lysyk stated.

“We also found a lack of clarity on whether the Ministry or CBS is responsible for identifying alternatives to blood, even though such alternatives could offer a cost-effective way to better manage supply, especially in times of shortages and crisis.”

The report states Ontario has experienced short-term shortages or potential shortages of blood components and products in the five-year period ending July 2020 on eight different occasions. These shortages lasted from a few days to almost three months.

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Read the report at [www.auditor.on.ca](http://www.auditor.on.ca)

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## Background and Other Findings:

- The portion of plasma collected domestically needed to produce the high demand blood product, immunoglobulins (Ig), has been declining steadily, from 22.7% in 2013/14 to 13.7% in 2019/20. The resulting reliance on blood product manufacturers in the United States for the supply of blood plasma is concerning because the Canadian demand for Ig has increased from 4 million grams to 6.5 million grams from 2013/14 to 2019/20.
- Ontario hospitals use their own unique systems to record how blood is used and do not consistently report this information to either the Ministry of Health (Ministry) or Canadian Blood Services (CBS). Immunoglobulins (Ig), which is a blood product, are in high demand as evidenced by the increased shipment to Ontario hospitals in the last 10 years and is of critical importance to certain patients. Even though provincial guidelines exist to help hospital physicians determine the appropriate dosage and conditions for which Ig should be prescribed, and almost one-quarter of what the Ministry paid CBS in 2019/20 is for Ig, neither the Ministry nor CBS has the information needed to help inform whether Ig was used appropriately according to provincial guidelines; such information is also needed to help forecast demand for this blood product.
- Ontario hospitals do not always follow best practice guidelines on blood use and are not required to do so. The Ministry-funded Ontario Regional Blood Coordinating Network, whose mandate includes improving hospital practices around blood transfusion, cannot require hospitals to open their records for a review of compliance with best practices or adopt best practice recommendation. Based on hospital's self-reporting, the Network in 2020 found that only 14% of responding hospitals were meeting the best practice of transfusing a single unit of blood more than 80% of the time.
- The Ministry does not use data on transfusion injuries and errors that are reported by Ontario hospitals to databases maintained by the federal government to help ensure Ontarians are experiencing better outcomes from blood transfusions.
- In 2019/20, the Ministry contributed \$562 million to CBS—representing about 50% of total funding from all provinces and territories—to provide blood to Ontario hospitals at no cost to them. About 40% of this funding went toward blood components while the other 60% went to blood products.
- The audit found that in 2019/20, 43% of hospitals did not report usage by blood type and 13% of hospitals did not report on the quantity of blood products used, making it more difficult for CBS to meet demand, particularly for higher demand blood components such as O negative red blood cells to be informed on how blood is used.