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Blood supply 'comfortable' as donations increase by 3,000

By Evelyn Ring

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2009

BLOOD donations increased by 3,100 last year, the equivalent of a week's blood supply, figures show.

The increase meant that the Irish Blood Transfusion Service (IBTS) was able to maintain the blood supply "comfortably" throughout the year.

The blood bank's annual report for 2008 shows that more than half of the 155,082 blood donors were men.

It also shows that more 28-year-olds give blood than any other age group.

Almost 700 more donors gave blood during 2008 and the frequency of donation also increased slightly and is now close to two per person per year.

The report also points out that tests on a new filter to remove the human form of mad cow disease, Creutzfeldt-Jacob Disease (vCJD) from donations indicate that it is safe for use in patients needing red cell transfusions.

The trial was conducted by Cork University Hospital on a filter to remove the vCJD infectious agent, a prion protein, and was the first of its kind in the world.

The study was completed this year and the filter was subsequently used on patients in Cavan General Hospital without any problems.

The blood bank is looking for up to €14 million annually in state funding to extend the use of the filter nationally.

This month, the British advisory body on blood safety recommended that the filter be used on transfusions for children born after 1996.

IBTS medical and scientific director, Dr William Murphy, said vCJD remained an unknown but serious risk to the safety of blood transfusion because there was no test to see if the disease is present.

Dr Murphy said no screening test had emerged that has the sensitivity to detect vCJD in blood donors.

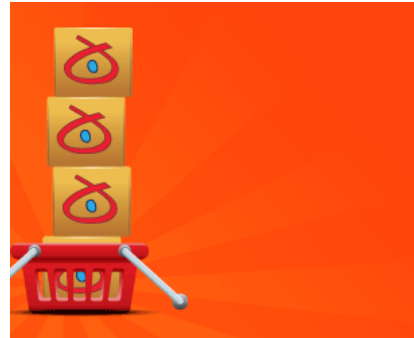
"So far no test has emerged that has the sensitivity to detect this elusive infection in the pre-clinical phase in blood donors. The IBTS continues to keep this area under close scrutiny," he said.

Blood donations are tested for syphilis, hepatitis and HIV.

Dr Murphy said that last year the blood bank began introducing the next generation of advanced blood testing – single donation virus testing that will replace the pooled sample testing in use.

"The test represents the holy grail of testing for HIV, hepatitis C and hepatitis B, giving the highest level test accuracy," said Dr Murphy.

This story appeared in the printed version of the Irish Examiner Monday, November 30, 2009



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