



This fact sheet aims to explain the difference between donating cord blood (to the BMDI Cord Blood Bank at the Royal Children's Hospital) and arranging for the collection and storage of cord blood with a private company. It also explains why the Royal Women's Hospital does not collect cord blood to be stored by private companies.

What is cord blood?

Cord blood is the blood left behind in the placenta and umbilical cord after the birth of a baby. It is a rich source of blood-forming stem cells that can be used instead of bone marrow transplants in children. Cord blood research throughout the world continues to explore its potential but there are no guarantees yet that it can prevent or cure the range of disease that some claim it can.

The placenta and the blood in it are normally discarded after the birth but at the Women's you can choose to donate your baby's cord blood to the BMDI Cord Blood Bank (BMDI CCB) established at the Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) and managed and organised as a collaboration between the RCH, the Murdoch Institute for Children's Research and the Bone Marrow Donor Institute (Fight Cancer Foundation).

Donating your baby's cord blood

The BMDI CBB collects donor cord blood which is used for children who normally require bone marrow transplant.

The Women's supports the collection of cord blood by the BMDI CBB because:

- the service is voluntary and cost free

Interested women complete a Donor Enrolment Form and place it in identifiable letterboxes in clinic areas.

- the service is available to sick children all over the world
- cord blood is available for sick children that is the best available match for their treatment

This is not necessarily blood that is donated by a relative, for example, the best possible matching blood for a sick child's treatment may be found on the other side of the world.

- hospital staff do not collect cord blood

The blood is collected by the BMDI CBB nurse. If you have agreed to donate your baby's cord blood the nurse will contact you and provide you with information regarding the service, you will be assessed for suitability and asked to provide consent. The BMDI CBB nurse attends the Women's birth suites to collect the cord blood at the time of birth and forwards it to the bank.

The BMDI Cord Blood Bank will only collect and store blood intended for your family's use if a member of your family has already been diagnosed with an illness that can be treated with cord blood.

This service is unavailable for women who deliver out of regular hours. For additional information women can contact the **BMDI nurse on (03) 8345 3385**.

Storing your baby's cord blood with a private company

Private companies store cord blood for families, at a cost, in case it should become possible to use the blood in the future to treat disease in a family.

The Women's does not encourage the private collection and storage of cord blood because:

- currently, the Women's does not agree with all of the claims made by private storage companies about the future health benefits of blood storage. In our view, there is still not enough proof that cord blood will offer a solution to everything that some organisations claim it will
- although preliminary data shows encouraging results in cord blood stem cell transplantation for a variety of diseases, the procedure at this time is considered experimental
- there is not enough reliable evidence to suggest that family members are the best donors for cord blood transplants
- philanthropic donation of cord blood for banking at no cost is to be encouraged by public health services.

The Women's policy is not to collect cord blood for private companies because:

- it is not always possible to collect blood from the cord so we cannot guarantee blood will be collected
- we cannot guarantee the condition of the blood after it leaves the hospital
- we do not want to endorse commercial services or products particularly when all the advertised benefits for patients are not guaranteed or scientifically established
- we cannot commit staff time to collecting cord blood.

While this is our current policy we are also committed to reviewing our policy in the future and possibly changing our policy as more research becomes available.

Further information

Royal Children's Hospital

Web: <http://www.rch.org.au>

Murdoch Institute for Children's Research

Web: <http://www.mcri.edu.au>

Fight Cancer Foundation

Web: <http://www.fightcancer.org.au>