

A new recall and test site for blood following mishap

By **KAREN SMITH**
The Champion

An internal review conducted in the wake of an early January blood recall has resulted in two findings that will improve safety of local blood supplies, says an official from the country's blood agency.

Canadian Blood Services (CBS) has decided to temporarily transfer all transmissible disease testing for blood collected in the area from Hamilton to Toronto, said the organization's chief executive officer, Lynda Cranston.

The agency entrusted with ensuring the safety of Canada's blood supply has also ordered another recall of about 2,500 units of blood that will be re-screened with a secondary test for HIV, she said.

The units were collected between December 4 and 15 — 11 days prior to the collection of 2,000 units first recalled.

"CBS pledged to be decisive in its actions in order to protect Canadians and provide them with the safest blood supply possible," Ms Cranston said.

"In Hamilton, both the temporary transfer of testing to Toronto and the voluntary recall demonstrate our commitment to safety."

CBS launched a review at the Hamilton Blood Centre after it was discovered in December that a wash solution for the testing of the HIV virus — the p-24 test — was used beyond its expiry date.

The p-24 test is a secondary test used to cover the "window period" of eight weeks before the antibody or primary test can become positive.

The test involves the same solution that resulted in the first recall of 2,000 units of blood January 6.

Milton District Hospital received 11 of the units. One was used in the treatment of a patient, but the blood was re-tested and proved to be safe.

The CBS has offered no explanation for the mishap, other than admitting it was the result of human error.

As a result of the ensuing investigation, CBS decided to also retest units collected earlier in December.

"All blood products in question were tested using the primary test for HIV and the results were normal," said Dr. Bill Francombe, CBS medical consultant in Hamilton.

For the blood collected between December 16 and 28, all recalled units except five have been retested and all results were normal, he said.

The same is expected for the blood that was collected earlier in December.

Unused products recalled from hospitals will be retested and re-issued if they're determined to be safe, Dr. Francombe said.

In cases where blood products in question have already been transfused, frozen samples of the product housed at the Hamilton centre will also be retested, he said.

And in cases where frozen samples aren't available, donors will be asked to submit a blood sample for testing.

The CBS is continuing its review of the matter both at the Hamilton centre and the Ottawa head office, said Wesley Rees, CBS vice-president of safety and performance management.

"During the next few weeks, staff at the Hamilton Blood Centre and head office will focus their attention on reviewing all operating and quality assurance procedures, while at the same time ensuring the ongoing quality and safety of blood products," he said.

"Our objective is to put in place the checks and balances to ensure this kind of error doesn't occur again."

In addition to its regular independent safety audits, CBS plans to review safety planning and procedures with all blood centres that it manages in Canada.

The temporary transfer of transmissible disease testing to the Toronto Blood Centre won't affect turnaround time for testing and therefore won't negatively impact on inventory nor product availability for any of the hospitals served by the Hamilton centre, Mr. Rees said. Other testing such as blood grouping and antibody investigation will continue to be performed in Hamilton.

The CBS was formed last year to control blood collection and distribution. Under Canadian Red Cross Society blood management, thousands were infected with Hepatitis C and the AIDS virus after receiving tainted blood.

People who have received blood products between December 4 and 15 and are concerned, are asked to contact their physician or call the CBS medical office at 522-6885, ext. 4327.

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LYNDA CRANSTON

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