

# Saving Baby's Cord Blood



Cord blood is the blood that remains in the umbilical cord and placenta immediately following birth. Cord blood stem cells have the ability to treat the same diseases as bone marrow with a significantly lower rejection rate. Umbilical cord blood also is a rich source of stem cells, which are the building blocks of the immune system. Stem cells can be used to treat a variety of diseases, including leukemia and other cancers, and blood and immune disorders.

Cord blood can be collected after a baby is born and the umbilical cord has been clamped and cut. The collection procedure is painless. When cord blood is collected and stored, the stem cells are immediately available for transplantation.

Widely treating diseases with stem cells has proved challenging because of a limited supply of donor cord blood. Another issue is difficulties in finding matching blood types among the 50,000 or so units kept in the approximately 20 cord-blood banks around the country.

Once you donate cord blood, it is placed on a national cord-blood registry list. Anyone who needs the cord blood can ask to use it for a transplant. If you need it before another patient needs it, you may have access to your baby's cord blood. Parents can choose to store cord blood at a private bank or give the cord blood to a public cord-blood bank.

## Cost

If cord blood is so good, why doesn't everybody bank it? Simple: the cost. Cord blood collection costs about \$1,400, and then about \$95 a year to store (you can store cord blood for up to 21 years).

These costs put cord-blood banking out of reach for many families. But should these families feel guilty if they don't save their children's cord blood? No. Even the American Academy of Pediatrics says "it is difficult to recommend that parents store their children's cord blood for future use."

## Bank On It?

The question of whether or not families should save cord blood isn't easy to answer — unless, perhaps, you have a family member who already has a condition that can be treated with a stem cell transplant, such as sickle cell anemia, thalassemia, aplastic anemia, leukemia, metabolic storage disorders and certain genetic immunodeficiencies. If you do, you should try to bank your baby's umbilical cord blood.

While a bone marrow transplant using your own child's cord blood stem cells could save his life, the chance you would have to use his stem cells is very small, at only about 1 in 2,700. If you chose not to

save your child's cord blood and ultimately needed it, you might be able to find a stem cell match from a bank that stores donated stem cells from unrelated donors.

There are benefits to having your own child's cord blood available, however. The cord blood is easy to get if you ever need it. Plus, these stem cells are a perfect match for your child. There is only a 25 percent chance that cord blood from your other children will be a match.

## Unrelated Cord Blood Banks

Deciding whether to save baby's cord blood would be easier for most people if there were more "unrelated" cord blood banks.

With this type of cord blood bank, you can donate your child's cord blood for free, if you live near one of the National Marrow Donor Program Cord Blood Banks. Such banks are located in 14 states: Alabama, California, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, New Jersey, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Washington. If your child never needs his own stem cells, then they could be used by another child who needed a transplant. ■

## Resources

- Abelson, R. (2005, April 15). *Group urges program to promote use of umbilical cord blood*. Retrieved May 2, 2005 from the World Wide Web: <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/health/article-page.html?res=9C0DE1DF113EF936A25757COA9639C8B63>
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- Cord Blood Donor Foundation. *What is cord blood?* Retrieved April 26, 2005 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.cordblooddonor.org>
- Keep Kids Healthy. *Cord blood banking*. Retrieved May 2, 2005 from the World Wide Web: [http://www.keepkidshealthy.com/pregnancy/cord\\_blood\\_banking.html](http://www.keepkidshealthy.com/pregnancy/cord_blood_banking.html)
- Verter, F. *A parent's guide to cord blood banks*. Retrieved April 26, 2005 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.parentsguidecordblood.com>

*The purpose of this patient education handout is to further explain or remind you about a medical condition. This handout is a general guide only. If you have specific questions, be sure to discuss them with your healthcare provider. This handout may be reproduced for distribution to patients.*