The National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) helps the NHS to provide safer healthcare for everyone. This information is about the advice the NPSA has given the NHS on making sure blood transfusions are carried out safely every day in the UK.

However, if a patient is given blood from the wrong group they can experience severe side effects or, in some rare cases, they may die.

The National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) is advising the NHS on ways of making sure blood transfusions are given as safely as possible. The NPSA has asked NHS hospitals to assess what initiatives they can introduce to help make sure everyone is given the right blood.

When you go to hospital for a blood transfusion, your hospital may have introduced one or more of the following safety initiatives:

- **Bar codes** – The use of bar codes (or using other electronic tracking systems) on blood samples and patients’ wristbands or identity cards can help staff ensure they match the right blood to the right patient.

- **Photo identification cards** – Patients who need regular blood transfusions may be offered a permanent photo identification (ID) card instead of being given a wristband each time they go to hospital. If you regularly receive blood transfusions and your hospital has introduced these cards, you should be given an information leaflet that tells you all about photo ID cards.

- **Labelling system** – If you need a blood transfusion you may be given a wristband to wear (as well as the regular hospital wristband you are given) that has a unique number on it. This number is matched against the number that is put on units of blood by laboratory staff. This helps to ensure you are given the right blood.

Hospital staff are also being advised that they must carry out a final check of your identity by your side before they start the transfusion. You can help by showing the person doing your transfusion your wristband or photo ID card before they begin and telling them your full name and date of birth.

The NPSA promotes safer healthcare by collecting and analysing information about patient safety incidents from staff and patients, and through working with NHS organisations to promote an open and fair culture.

If you would like more information about the NPSA’s work on blood safety, visit our website at: www.npsa.nhs.uk