



ANTI-HBc INFORMATION SHEET

What is the anti-HBc test?

It is a test that detects the presence of both IgM and IgG antibody to hepatitis B core antigen (HBc) and is indicated as an aid in the diagnosis of ongoing or previous hepatitis B viral infection. It is used as a screening test for blood to prevent the transmission of hepatitis B virus (HBV). It appears at the onset of symptoms in acute hepatitis B and persists for life.

What does a positive anti-HBc test result mean?

A positive anti-HBc may indicate one of the following:

- Past hepatitis B infection.
- False-positive reaction, meaning it is not a true infection.
- Possible current latent infection.

The presence of anti-HBc alone is difficult to interpret, as the test often gives a positive reaction due to factors not associated with hepatitis B infection (false-positive). There is currently no confirmatory test to determine whether the test result is a true-positive or a false-positive. Additional testing is performed to detect HBV.

How is blood tested for hepatitis B?

All donated blood is tested for HBV before it is transfused to a patient. A sample of the donor's blood is tested using screening tests. One detects the hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) and one detects antibodies to hepatitis B core antigen (anti-HBc). Another detects viral genetic material and is called Nucleic Acid Amplification Test (NAT). All blood from donors who test repeatedly reactive (positive) on either screening test is destroyed and is NOT used for transfusion. Confirmatory testing is performed on HBsAg reactive and NAT reactive donations to determine true infection. For the purposes of counseling, further confirmatory tests may be performed. If the screening and confirmatory tests for HBsAg and/or NAT are positive, a donor is considered infected with HBV and is permanently deferred from donating blood.

Why can't a person who is deferred for being anti-HBc positive donate blood?

Studies show that persons who test repeatedly reactive (positive) for anti-HBc have a very slight risk of transmitting hepatitis to blood recipients and therefore are indefinitely deferred from donating blood for others. The reason for your deferral as a donor at this time is because we want to be extra cautious. If any confirmatory tests become available, or if future developments permit a change in our policy, we may contact you.

Why can't I donate if my doctor says I do not have and/or never had hepatitis B?

Individuals can be perfectly healthy, give a negative history, and yet be carriers of one or more hepatitis viruses. Unfortunately, the presence of hepatitis viruses cannot always be detected with absolute certainty by any presently available means, including history, physical exam, or laboratory tests. While some requirements and recommendations may seem inconvenient or not reasonable in all situations, they actually represent measures taken to ensure that blood and blood products are as safe as possible. There is no doubt that some persons without hepatitis or other infectious diseases are deferred as a result of established criteria.

For additional information about anti-HBc, the following resource may be helpful:
www.cdc.gov/hepatitis - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention hepatitis web site