Questions From Readers

Do Jehovah’s Witnesses accept injections of a blood fraction, such as immune globulin or albumin?

Some do, believing that the Scriptures do not clearly rule out accepting an injection of a small fraction, or component, taken from blood.

The Creator first laid upon all mankind the obligation to avoid taking in blood: “Every moving animal that is alive may serve as food for you. . . . Only flesh with its soul—its blood—you must not eat.” (Genesis 9:3, 4) Blood was sacred and so could be used only in sacrifice. If not used in that way, it was to be disposed of on the ground.—Leviticus 17:13, 14; Deuteronomy 12:15, 16.

This was no mere temporary restriction for Jews. The need to abstain from blood was restated for Christians. (Acts 21:25) Around them in the Roman Empire, God’s law was commonly broken, since people ate food made with blood. It was also broken for “medical” reasons; Tertullian reports that some men took in blood thinking that it could cure epilepsy. ‘They quaffed with greedy thirst the blood of criminals slain in the arena.’ He added: “Blush for your vile ways before the Christians, who have not even the blood of animals at their meals.” Jehovah’s Witnesses today are just as determined not to violate God’s law, no matter how common it is for others to eat food made with blood. In the 1940’s, blood transfusions came into widespread use, and the Witnesses saw that obeying God required that they also avoid blood transfusions, even if doctors urged these.

At first, most transfusions were of whole blood. Later, researchers began to separate blood into its primary components, for doctors concluded that a certain patient might not need all major parts of blood. If they gave him only one component, it would be less risky for him and the doctors could get more use out of the blood available.

Human blood can be separated into dark cellular material and a yellowish fluid (plasma, or serum). The cellular part (45 percent by volume) is made up of what are commonly called red cells, white cells, and platelets. The other 55 percent is the plasma. This is 90 percent water, but it carries small amounts of many proteins, hormones, salts, and enzymes. Today, much of the donated blood is separated into the primary components. One patient may be given a transfusion of plasma (perhaps FFP, fresh-frozen plasma) to treat shock. But an anemic patient might be given packed red cells, that is, red cells that have been stored and then put in a fluid and transfused. Platelets and white cells are also transfused but less commonly.

In Bible times men had not devised such techniques for using these components. God simply commanded: ‘Abstain from blood.’ (Acts 15:28, 29) But why should anyone think that it would make a difference whether the blood was whole or had been separated into these components? Though some men drank blood, Christians refused even if it meant death. Do you think that they would have responded differently if someone had collected blood, allowed it to separate, and then offered them just the plasma or just the clotted part, perhaps in blood sausage? No, indeed! Hence, Jehovah’s Witnesses do not accept transfusions of whole blood or of its primary components (red cells, white cells, platelets, or plasma) used to accomplish a similar purpose.

As the question suggests, though, scientists have learned about specialized blood fractions and how to employ such a common issue involves the plasma proteins—globulins, albumin, and fibrinogen. Likely, the most widespread therapeutic use of such is injecting immune globulin. Why is that done?

Your body can produce antibodies against certain diseases, giving you active immunity. This is the basis for advance inoculation with a vaccine (toxoid) against polio, mumps, rubella (measles), diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis, and typhoid fever. However, if someone has recently been exposed to certain serious diseases, physicians may recommend an injection of a se-

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rum (antitoxin) immediate passive immunity gained from already made antibodies, from an immune system in time.

In view of the fact that bloodstain from bloodstains can not be accepted an injection of a whole blood component is a clear no.

Others have tried to

* With recombine engineering, technologists are developing similar agents made from blood.
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rum (antitoxin) to give him im-
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t recently such injections have
been made by extracting im-
mune globulin, which contains
antibodies, from a person al-
ready immune. The passive im-
unity gained from the injection
is not permanent, for the inject-
ed antibodies pass out of his
system in time.

In view of the command to 'ab-
stain from blood,' some Chris-
tians have felt that they should
not accept an immune globulin
(protein) injection, even though it
was only a blood fraction. Their
stand is clear and simple—no
blood component in any form or
amount.

Others have felt that a serum

* With recombinant DNA, or genetic-
ingeneering, techniques, scientists are
developing similar products that are not
made from blood.

(antitoxin), such as immune
globulin, containing only a tiny
fraction of a donor's blood plas-
ma and used to bolster their de-
ense against disease, is not the
same as a life-sustaining blood
transfusion. So their con-
sciences may not forbid them to
take immune globulin or similar
fractions. They may conclude
that for them the decision will
rest primarily on whether they
are willing to accept any health
risks involved in an injection
made from others' blood.

It is significant that the blood
system of a pregnant woman is
separate from that of the fetus in
her womb; their blood types are
often different. The mother does
ger pass her blood into the fetus.

* One example is Rh immune glob-
ulin, which doctors may recommend
when there is Rh incompatibility be-
tween a woman and her fetus. Anoth-
er is Factor VIII, which is given to
hemophiliacs.

A pregnant woman has an ac-
tive mechanism by which some
immune globulin moves from the
mother's blood to the fetus. Be-
cause this natural movement of
antibodies into the fetus occurs
in all pregnancies, babies are
born with a degree of normal
protective immunity to certain
infections.

It is similar with albumin, which
doctors may prescribe as a
treatment for sick or certain
other conditions. Researchers
have proved that albumin from
the plasma is also transported,
though less efficiently, across the
placenta from a mother into
her fetus.

That some protein fractions
from the plasma do move natu-
ally into the blood system of
another individual (the fetus)
may be another consideration
when a Christian is deciding
whether he will accept immune
globulin, albumin, or similar in-
jections of plasma fractions.
One person may feel that he in
good conscience can; another
may conclude that he cannot.
Each must resolve the matter
personally before God.

* Evidence shows that nonblood
volume replacement fluids (such as
hetastarch [HES]) can be used effec-
tively to treat shock and other condi-
tions for which an albumin solution
might have been used previously.