



## UMBILICAL CORD BLOOD BANKING

The California Department of Justice issues this consumer alert to inform Californians about umbilical cord blood banking.

### **WHAT IS UMBILICAL CORD BLOOD BANKING?**

Umbilical cord blood contains stem cells. The cord blood and stem cells can be collected and potentially used later in a blood stem cell transplant to treat certain medical conditions. Researchers may also use cord blood stem cells in clinical trials to study certain disorders. Cord blood can be stored in private or public blood banks.

### **WHAT IS PUBLIC CORD BLOOD BANKING?**

Parents can voluntarily donate cord blood at participating hospitals. Donating to public cord blood banks is free. Publicly banked cord blood is available to the public, including children with life-threatening diseases who need a stem cell donor or researchers who may use the donations in studies.

Public cord blood banks are highly regulated to protect public safety. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and American Academy of Pediatrics recommend public cord blood banking. Parents interested in donating can contact their hospital to confirm whether the hospital accepts cord blood donations.

### **WHAT IS PRIVATE CORD BLOOD BANKING?**

Many parents pay companies to store cord blood believing they can use the cord blood for their family's future use. Private cord blood banks charge thousands of dollars in fees to process, store, and ship cord blood every year.

Many medical experts believe that there is no value in storing cord blood with private banks. Doctors have found it is more cost efficient and more medically appropriate to use adult stem cells and stem cells from relatives, rather than cord blood, in medical treatments. As such, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists do not recommend families pay for private cord blood storage because there is not enough evidence to support the practice.<sup>1</sup> In fact, according to the Center for International Blood and Marrow Transplant Research, since 2010, only 19 stem-cell transplants have been performed using a patient's own cord blood, even though families have paid to store more than 2 million samples in private cord blood banks.

### **Know the Facts About Private Cord Blood Banking**

- Your child may not be able to receive treatment using cord blood that you store with a private bank. Individuals with genetic diseases often require transplants using donor stem cells.
- Private cord blood units can become contaminated during collection or while in storage. Unlike public cord blood banks, private banks are not required to meet high standards that help ensure cord blood quality and safety. Many doctors refuse to use contaminated cord blood for transplantation or medical research.
- Cord blood units collected and stored for private use do not always contain the number of stem cells necessary for transplantation or medical research.
- Scientists do not know how long cord blood units can be preserved. Some private banks promise that cord blood will last a lifetime. But no evidence supports that claim.
- Stem cell transplants using privately banked cord blood are rare. Recent advances in medicine are making them even rarer.

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1 <https://www.acog.org/clinical/clinical-guidance/committee-opinion/articles/2019/03/umbilical-cord-blood-banking>.



### **If you are considering storing cord blood with a private bank:**

- Ask your prenatal care provider about the benefits and risks of private cord blood storage.
- Ask the private cord blood bank about their cancellation and refund policy. For example, will the bank notify you if the cord blood that you store with the bank contains insufficient cells or becomes contaminated? Will the bank provide a full refund if cord blood that you store does not contain enough cells or becomes contaminated during collection or while in storage?
- Ask the private cord blood bank how many contaminated cord blood units the bank has stored.
- Ask the private cord blood bank how many cord blood units that have been stored with the bank contained an insufficient number of cells and were thus unusable.
- Ask the private cord blood bank whether it has a method of backup electrical systems in case of storage equipment failure.
- Ask the private cord blood bank to disclose the longest amount of time a cord blood unit has been stored with the bank and been found viable for treatment or research.

If you have concerns about a private cord blood bank, please file a complaint with our office at [oag.ca.gov/report](https://oag.ca.gov/report).

### ***ADDITIONAL RESOURCES***

- [California Department of Public Health](#)
- [American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists: Frequently Asked Questions About Cord Blood Banking](#)
- [Association for the Advancement of Blood & Biotherapies: Umbilical Cord Blood Donation Frequently Asked Questions](#)