

USE OF GREYHOUNDS FOR BLOOD DONATION: GBGB POSITION STATEMENT

Why is canine blood donation necessary?

Dogs undergoing surgery or with particular medical conditions sometimes require blood transfusions. The blood used in those transfusions has to be donated by another dog.

Greyhounds are often considered to be suitable blood donors because

- (i) They have a high percentage of red blood cells
- (ii) Many have a 'negative' blood type which means that they are 'universal donors' i.e., their blood can be safely given to a dog with any blood type
- (iii) Their temperament is often such that they are quite relaxed about the blood donation process

Where is donated blood sourced from?

In the U.K., donated canine blood is usually sourced from one of two sources:

- (i) From a central canine blood bank which collects blood from donor dogs and stores it until it is needed e.g. The Pet Blood Bank
<https://www.petbloodbankuk.org/>
- (ii) From an individual dog who has blood collected by a Veterinary Surgeon for that blood to be immediately used in another specific dog who needs a transfusion

How is blood collected from a dog?

It is important that a thorough assessment is made by a veterinary surgeon prior to blood donation to ascertain whether the dog is a suitable donor. This will include an assessment of the dog's temperament, age, weight and health status and the likely welfare impacts upon that individual dog of being a donor.

If a dog is identified as being a suitable donor, the donation procedure usually involves the dog lying on a table for 5-10 minutes whilst blood is collected from a vein using a catheter and blood collection bag.

Dogs are not routinely sedated to have blood collected from them.

What is the legal situation around canine blood donation?

All canine blood transfusions in the UK must be performed by a Veterinary Surgeon (MRCVS or FRCVS) (who may delegate to a Registered Veterinary Nurse acting under the Veterinary Surgeon's direction (Veterinary Surgeons Act, 1966, [Schedule 3])).

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons' Code of Professional Conduct

(<https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/advice-and-guidance/faqs--routine-veterinary-practice-and-clinical-veterinary/>) states that:

‘Taking blood from healthy donors with the informed consent of the owner and with the intention of administering the blood or its products to a recipient animal is routine veterinary practice where there is an immediate or anticipated clinical indication for the transfusion. Such a clinical procedure would be acceptable on the scale of an individual veterinary practice or between other practices in the locality.’

For there to be an ‘immediate or anticipated clinical indication’ for the transfusion the recipient must be identified at the time of collection

Where there is no identified recipient, or where the blood is taken from the donor based on an estimate of the demand, the donation is classified as blood banking’

Canine blood banks must comply with the Veterinary Medicines Regulations overseen by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-autogenous-vaccine-non-food-animal-blood-bank-equine-stem-cell-centre-authorisation#non-food-animal-blood-bank-authorisation-nfabba>.

What are the ethical issues around canine blood donation?

Blood donation, unlike almost all other veterinary procedures, does not benefit the animal having the procedure performed upon them. On the contrary, it exposes them to (at least risks of) (a) stress and (b) (usually minimal) pain.

Those who take an ‘rights’ based ethical approach to veterinary ethics often do not consider it ethical to subject an animal to such harms.

Most people in British society, on the other hand, take a utilitarian approach to ethics which weighs (potential) harms against (potential) benefits. In the case of canine blood donation the (potential) harms to the donor dog of stress and (minimal) pain are balanced against the benefits to the recipient dog of receiving a blood transfusion.

How these harms and benefits balance out will depend upon and vary with the individual donor dog and the individual recipient dog. That is why it is so important that a Veterinary Surgeon fully assesses the donor dog before any donation is made, and why the Veterinary Surgeon is ultimately responsible for deciding whether or not to proceed.

The GBGB’s position

The GBGB’s position is that canine blood donation can be ethically justified in a harm:benefit analysis, providing that

- (i) Thorough assessments of the donor dog’s health, history and welfare (and any necessary blood tests) are undertaken by a MRCVS or FRCVS prior to any donation.
- (ii) Decision-making about whether or not the dog is suitable to act as a donor is made by the attending Veterinary Surgeon, on an individual dog basis.

- (iii) Any blood donation (and subsequent transfusion) is in alignment with national legislation and with the RCVS Code of Professional Conduct

No active GBGB registered racing greyhound shall be permitted to donate blood, unless in extenuating or emergency circumstances and after which a minimum eight weeks rest period shall be enforced. Such donations must be reported to GBGB's Welfare Department. Physiologically, greyhounds are often suitable to act as blood donors. Many greyhounds tolerate acting as blood donors very well. Others could find it stressful. Blood donation is also not without risk – adverse post-donation effects can occur – although the incidence of adverse reactions is reported to be low. The GBGB encourages any owners of retired greyhounds thinking of offering their greyhound to be a blood donor to

- (i) Educate themselves about the process by talking to their veterinary surgeon or contacting a canine blood bank authorised by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, and
- (ii) Carefully consider the health status and temperament of the individual greyhound, and how acting as a blood donor is likely to impact the individual greyhound's welfare.

To avoid the possibility of unregulated commercial exploitation of canine blood donation and the associated welfare risks to greyhounds which that would present, the GBGB does not think it appropriate for owners / owners' representatives presenting greyhounds to be used as blood donors to receive any financial compensation for doing so. This would not preclude veterinary practices offer 'rewards' to donor dogs, for example in the form of edible treats.

Useful references:

Dini, R.; Agnoli, C.; Mariti, C.; Gori, E.; Vasylyeva, K.; Tumbarello, M.; Marchetti, V. Insights into the Canine Blood Donor Experience: A Multicenter Study on Physiological and Behavioral Changes. *Vet Sci.* 2025, 12:876. <https://doi.org/10.3390/vetsci12090876>

Ashall, V. (2009). Canine blood donor. In *Practice: Continuing Education in Veterinary Practice*, 31(10), 527. <https://doi.org/10.1136/inpract.31.10.527>

[Prevalence and characteristics of adverse reactions in dogs donating blood - Ferreira - 2025 - Journal of Small Animal Practice - Wiley Online Library](#)