

YOUR CHILD'S DOCTOR HAS ORDERED A BLOOD CULTURE

Your child's health is our number one priority. Obtaining the correct lab specimens will help to make an accurate and timely diagnosis. Below are some of the most common questions asked when a blood culture is ordered.

1. **What is a blood culture?** A blood culture is ordered when the doctor suspects there may be bacteria in the blood. Bacteria are not normally found in the blood stream. A specific amount of blood is taken from your child and is tested in the laboratory. If bacteria grow, the doctor orders the correct antibiotic that will kill the bacteria.
2. **How much blood has to be taken for the culture?** The amount of blood needed for a culture depends on the child's weight. This amount of blood represents a very small portion of the total amount present in the body. The body makes new blood every day to replace what is removed.
3. **How do they get the blood needed for the culture?** If your child has a central line or a permanent port, the nurse will get the first sample from one of these lines. Another blood sample may be obtained from a vein in the arm, or from another line if your child has two central lines.
4. **Why is it necessary to get two samples of blood?** The practice of getting two separate samples is based on national recommendations from the Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute. These recommendations are based on scientific research, written by leading physicians and scientists, and are known to be the most accurate way to diagnose a blood stream infection. If the correct amount of blood is obtained, there is a better chance of finding the bacteria and treating it in a timely manner.
5. **If my child has a central line, why is it necessary to perform another stick to the arm?** The arm is the recommended site to get another sample of blood. Getting two samples of blood at the same time (one from the central line and one from the arm) will help the doctors determine if bacteria are in the bloodstream and if they are causing a blood stream infection. Getting the blood test this way will help your child's doctor prescribe the most effective antibiotic and possibly prevent the central line from having to be removed and/or replaced.
6. **What happened if you cannot get a sample of blood from the arm?** If the blood cannot be obtained from the arm, the nurse will get a sample from another line (if present) or get another separate sample from the central line.
7. **Will the blood culture be painful for my child?** If a blood sample is taken from the arm, there may be a "stick or a pinch" but the discomfort is temporary. There are techniques to help divert the child's attention during the lab draw and these techniques will be utilized if necessary.
8. **How long will it take before I know what the results are?** Once the blood is taken to the laboratory, it may take up to five days before the bacteria grow and can be identified, so your child's physician may adjust your child's treatment based on the results found.
9. **What will happen to my child while waiting for results?** Your child's physician will begin treatment if they feel it is necessary.
10. **How often do blood cultures need to be obtained?** Blood cultures are obtained as frequently as deemed necessary by your child's physician. If the correct amount of blood is obtained, additional blood cultures may not be needed. Your doctor may order additional blood cultures based on the results and your child's condition.

If you have any further questions, please contact your child's nurse or physician.

