

# CORD BLOOD AS A TREATMENT FOR CEREBRAL PALSY



Umbilical cord blood is emerging as a promising treatment option for people with cerebral palsy. This fact sheet has been created for people with CP, parents and families to explain what cord blood treatment is, detail the current status of cord blood in Australia and explore the future possibilities for the CP community.

While there are many therapies and medical interventions that help manage the symptoms of CP, there are currently limited therapies that treat the underlying brain injury that causes CP.

Umbilical cord blood may be the solution. In April 2025, the first child with CP was treated through a compassionate access program in Australia at Monash Health – a turning point after years of international-only access. While cord blood is not yet available as a standard treatment in Australia, this may change in the near future – so what is it, how may people with CP benefit, and what needs to be done to make cord blood treatment a reality?

## What is cord blood, and how does it work?

Umbilical cord blood is collected from the placenta after a baby is born and the umbilical cord is cut. Cord blood is a rich source of stem and immune cells, which can activate repair processes in the human body.

An infusion of cord blood is administered in a hospital or clinical setting under the supervision of a medical team. Cord blood is given via a drip into the arm. This takes roughly 20 minutes and is followed by monitoring for any side effects. This is a hospital-delivered procedure that has now taken place in Australia under specialist care.

CPA is now working to help more families access this safely and equitably.

## What the research tells us

Cord blood has a long history as a treatment for blood cancers, but over the last 20 years the evidence has grown that cord blood could be a viable treatment for CP.

Studies have shown that, when accompanied with the right physical therapy, cord blood is safe and effective as a treatment for CP. Clinical trials have demonstrated improved gross motor function in children with CP after treatment, with the latest research suggesting that the greatest effect is seen in younger children with milder CP.

It is not yet known whether cord blood can be effective for improving other skills or goals (such as cognition) or if it can be helpful in older children and adults, or in those with more severe CP.

Cord blood helps the brain build new pathways, and rehabilitation can help strengthen and refine these pathways, therefore a cord blood infusion should always be coupled with goal-directed physiotherapy or occupational therapy.



**Globally, more than 800 children and adults have received cord blood treatment for CP across 15 published clinical trials**





### **Did you know?**

*Of all the CP-specific interventions identified in the 'Traffic Light' system, a globally-recognised grading system that ranks how effective treatments for CP are, cord blood is the only one of 54 'green light' (effective) interventions that is not currently available as standard care.*

## **A new frontier of CP treatment?**

As a permanent and life-long condition, unlocking a new treatment that can actively reduce severity of symptoms in some people with CP could be a gamechanger.

CPA researchers are working closely with national and international experts to ensure that Australian families have a fair and evidence-based pathway to cord blood treatment.

In the last few years alone, hundreds of children have been treated with cord blood overseas via regulated access programs not currently offered here. Families are asking why cord blood is not accessible in Australia, with many travelling overseas at significant personal expense to access cord blood in other countries.

### **It's now time for more Australian families to have the same opportunity.**

The next step is to connect families, researchers, clinicians and allies to ensure equitable access for children with CP who may benefit.

## **Can my child access cord blood in Australia?**

In 2025, the first Australian child with CP received their own cord blood under the Special Access Scheme (SAS). CPA is now exploring how more families with stored autologous cord blood, or potentially sibling cord blood may be able to pursue similar access through their local hospital. While not yet widely available and funding pathways remain unclear, this early step marks a hopeful shift toward broader treatment access in Australia.


## **Supporting family-led access to treatment**

CPA is inviting interested families to lend their voices to support access to cord blood treatment for CP in Australia.

Whilst cord blood treatment may not be suitable for all children with CP, if you are interested in treatment and have cord blood stored, we want to support your efforts to receive care.

**Help shape the future of treatment in Australia — visit our website to sign up for updates or share your interest in accessing cord blood therapy. Contact us at: [celltherapies@cerebralpalsy.org.au](mailto:celltherapies@cerebralpalsy.org.au)**

### **For more information, get in touch:**

 [cerebralpalsy.org.au/advocacy/umbilical-cord-blood/](https://cerebralpalsy.org.au/advocacy/umbilical-cord-blood/)

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