Intravenous Iron Therapy for Iron Deficiency (Information for Patients)

Why is iron important?
Iron is an essential mineral. It is part of hemoglobin. Hemoglobin carries oxygen in the blood and helps make red blood cells. If you have very little iron, you may have very few red blood cells. This condition is called anemia.

Why does oral iron (in pill form) not work as well as intravenous iron (in the vein)?
Some people may have side effects from oral iron pills or cannot absorb oral iron into their body. It can also take many months for you to get the same dose of iron from oral iron as you can get from one dose of intravenous (IV) iron (iron given in the vein).

Who should get IV iron?
Health Canada has approved iron to be given in the vein (IV) for people who have iron deficiency anemia and also have kidney disease. However, IV iron has been studied for many conditions “off label”. Your doctor may suggest IV iron for iron deficiency anemia if you have side effects to iron pills, if iron pills have not worked or if you have severe anemia.

What are the risks of IV iron?
Common mild side effects (about 1 person in every 20 may have these): low blood pressure (dizziness), muscle cramps, joint pain, headache, injection site swelling, chest discomfort, nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea.

Serious allergic reactions (rashes, face swelling and wheezing) including anaphylaxis, are rare.

After you get IV iron, you will be watched for 30 minutes to make sure you do not have an allergic reaction or a drop in your blood pressure. If you have any serious reactions after leaving the Heart Function Clinic, return immediately or proceed to your closest emergency department.

Before your first dose of IV iron, tell your doctor or nurse if you are allergic to any medications, including iron pills.

Which forms of intravenous iron might I get?
There following products are supplied by Sunnybrook’s pharmacy: iron isomaltoside (Monoferric®) and iron sucrose (Venofer®). Monoferric® 500mg is given in the vein over 60 minutes. Venofer® 300mg is given in the vein over 2 hours.

Do I need to pay for my intravenous iron infusions, and how much do they cost?
You may have to pay for your intravenous iron. The cost of Venofer® is $145 for a dose of 300mg. The cost of Monoferric® is $274 for a 500mg dose, and $535 for a 1000mg dose. This cost includes the fee charged by the pharmacy. If you have private insurance, Venofer® and Monoferric® may be on the list of covered medications.

If you are covered by the Ontario Drug Benefit Program (65+ years old, or with Ontario Works, Trillium, ODSP), ODB may cover some of the cost of IV iron if you have already tried oral iron, and your anemia did not get better.

How do I obtain my intravenous iron supply?
You will be picking up your intravenous iron prescription at the Sunnybrook Pharmacy, and you will be sent to the Transfusion Medicine Clinic (TMC) located at Sunnybrook Hospital on M Ground, 601.