

ISBT Code-128 Symbology Questions and Answers

Q: What is ISBT Code-128?

A: *The International Society of Blood Transfusion (ISBT) publishes a list of international standards regarding the information that is printed on the labels of blood products, and how that information is interpreted by instrumentation via barcodes. Code-128 stands for the symbology used in the barcoding of that information. The Blood Center currently uses Codabar symbology and is in the process of transitioning to ISBT Code-128.*

Q: Why is The Blood Center changing to ISBT Code-128?

A: *The American Association of Blood Banks (AABB), an industry accreditation agency, established an implementation deadline of May 1, 2008 more than two years ago and the majority of blood centers nationally are expected to convert to this new symbology by this date.*

Q: When will the change to ISBT Code-128 take place?

A: *AABB standards require full implementation by May 1, 2008. The Blood Center has chosen to adopt the standards slightly over two weeks prior to the deadline by implementing on April 14, 2008.*

Q: What does this mean for my facility?

A: *All blood banking and transfusion staff at your facility will need to be trained on the use of the new labels.*

- The unit number has expanded from seven-digits to 13-digits. The 13-digit number has to be recorded in its entirety. Every part of the 13-digit number is important to uniquely identify the unit. This information may be required to investigate adverse events such as transfusion reactions, or transfusion related illnesses/diseases.*
- The product codes have changed from five-digits to eight-digits. The eight-digit product code has to be recorded in its entirety. Again, every part of the product code uniquely identifies that product and may be required to investigate adverse events.*
- Expiration date and ABO/Rh differences. Autologous, directed, biohazardous, and emergency released products look distinctly different than those labels currently in use. Your facility's computer system, barcode scanners, label printers, etc., may require upgrades in order to accommodate the new symbology field lengths.*

Q: My facility is not computerized, so ISBT Code-128 doesn't affect me right?

A: *Wrong. Even facilities that record information manually are affected by this change. In addition to educating your staff about the label changes, any forms that are used to record the information may require modifications due to the longer numbers.*

Q: What do the ISBT Code-128 labels look like?

A: *Here's an example of an A-Positive, AS-1, Red Blood Cell label.*

Q: Where can I get more information?

A: *You can go to www.thebloodcenter.org and click "ISBT Information". There you will find PowerPoint presentations, label examples, product code lists, and other tools to assist you with your training and implementation. You can also contact Garrick Chatelain, Projects Director at The Blood Center, at 504-524-1322 or by e-mail at gchatelain@thebloodcenter.org.*

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