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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
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Dear Dr. Redfield:

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic that is currently developing in the United States (U.S.) and around the world is challenging our already strapped public health system. As the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has coordinated the response to this epidemic it has used the Pandemic Intervals Framework (PIF)¹. Under this framework, a key strategy to combat a pandemic is appropriate public health measures such as social distancing, cancellation of public events and gathering, expanded use of teleworking, and closures of schools and child-care facilities. While these strategies are necessary and appropriate public health measures, we want to ensure there are not unintended consequences such as a dramatic reduction in the number of healthy individuals donating blood.

Maintaining a safe and adequate blood supply during this epidemic continues to be a critical public health objective. While efforts to reduce non-essential blood component use, such as limiting elective surgeries, can reduce the strain on the blood supply, the impact of these blood management strategies is not big enough to make up for the loss of donors. Further, for many patients – such as cancer patients, those with blood disorders, trauma victims, and others – the need for blood will continue even as the COVID-19 outbreak grows.

Blood must be constantly and regularly collected from donors in the community. Blood has a short shelf life, up to 42 days for red blood cells but only five days for platelets. This short dating creates logistical challenges in that the products must be continuously replenished. While blood drives may bring together groups of people, blood collection activities are not “mass gatherings,” rather they are controlled events conducted using appropriate infection control mechanisms intended to assure the safety of the products, donors, and staff. In addition, more stringent infection control

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [Pandemic Intervals Framework \(PIF\)](#)

plans have been developed by blood centers, and could be implemented as local health departments deem additional precautions are appropriate.

As stewards of the nation's blood supply, it is essential that calls for social distancing measures explicitly exclude blood donation activities to ensure critical patient needs continue to be met. As a result of COVID-19, businesses, schools, and the public have responded with several social distancing efforts. While these efforts are intended to limit the spread of COVID-19, closed business campuses, high schools and universities, as well as cancellations of gatherings by churches and community organizations have resulted in many canceled blood drives.

The blood community has established mechanisms to ensure a safe and robust blood supply, however, COVID-19 has the potential to wreak havoc on blood collections as public health measures are implemented nationwide. The entire blood community is united and undertaking massive efforts to educate the public about the safety and necessity for blood donation, supported by many local health departments actively encouraging donations. However, more is necessary. Governmental support is required to encourage all healthy individuals to donate blood and to limit the negative impact that social distancing has on blood donation efforts.



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