

Message to Blood Donors During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The AABB Interorganizational Task Force on Domestic Disasters and Acts of Terrorism issued the following statement regarding blood donation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, the blood community applauds those individuals who have selflessly responded to the call for blood donations during this time. Since blood has a limited shelf life, the need for blood donors always exists. The need for blood donations from individual volunteers will remain throughout the pandemic to continually replenish the blood supply and ensure availability for patients in need.

The U.S. blood supply faces an unprecedented situation with a multitude of blood drives canceled as organizations and businesses temporarily close. It is important to emphasize that the need for blood remains during the pandemic and countless patients across the nation will continue to rely on blood donors to help provide a life-saving component of their health care.

As individuals donate and make appointments during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, a number of questions continue to arise. The AABB Interorganizational Task Force on Domestic Disasters and Acts of Terrorism has addressed some of the most frequently asked questions below.

Is blood still needed?

Yes. Blood is needed every day to provide essential, life-saving treatments for patients. In the United States, a patient is treated with a blood transfusion every two seconds. This is only possible because of the generosity of our country's blood donors. COVID-19 is expected to continue to cause disruptions to the blood supply for the duration of the pandemic. Healthy individuals are needed to help replenish the supply during this time and after. Individuals are encouraged to contact their local blood center to determine when a donation may be most needed.

How much blood does the health care system need?

This can vary, depending on a number of factors. However, in normal times, the blood community estimates that about 33,000 units of blood are needed each day to meet patient needs. Since blood has a limited shelf life, the need for donors never diminishes.

Which patients need blood?

A variety of patients regularly need blood as part of life-saving treatment. This includes new mothers who may have experienced complications during delivery, patients with cancer who require blood as part of their regular treatment regimen, people with sickle cell disease who require periodic blood transfusions to remain healthy, trauma victims who experienced significant blood loss, patients who require surgery and need blood to ensure a healthy recovery, and many others. The reality is that any of us – or any of our loved ones – could require a blood transfusion.

Why are some blood donors being asked to make an appointment?

Some blood centers are asking donors to make an appointment for the near future to help manage the flow of donors as they adhere to social distancing practices and to ensure a continued supply of blood for patients throughout this pandemic. Some centers saw an increase in donors following the media coverage about the need for blood and the call for donations by government officials; they may be asking donors to return later to avoid crowding at locations and to ensure stability for the blood supply.

Is giving blood safe during a pandemic?

Protecting the health and safety of donors, patients and blood center staff remains the top priority for the blood community. Measures already in place at blood centers are designed to provide the highest level of safety and infection control. In addition, blood centers throughout the country are taking extra precautions to help ensure the safety of both donors and staff, including:

- Implementing social distancing practices between donors, furniture and equipment.
- Increasing diligence around infection control.
- Encouraging donation-by-appointment-only.
- Increasing the frequency of cleaning for all surfaces, equipment, restrooms and common areas.

Is it legal to give blood, even in areas with new shelter-in-place laws?

Blood donation has been deemed an essential activity by government and public health officials. Individuals are allowed to leave their home to donate blood to help patients in need.

Is there a risk that COVID-19 could be transmitted by blood transfusion?

Data have shown that respiratory viruses, including COVID-19, are not known to be transmitted via blood donation or transfusion. According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), there have been no reported or suspected cases of transfusion-transmitted COVID-19. In addition, no cases of transfusion-transmission were ever reported for the other two coronaviruses that emerged during the past two decades (SARS and MERS).

Who should donate blood?

All healthy and eligible individuals that are feeling well are asked to consider donating blood. Individuals should not donate blood if they are feeling ill, have COVID-19, or have been exposed to someone with, or with the potential to have, COVID-19. Individuals who are recovered from COVID-19 should wait at least 28 days after symptoms have subsided to donate blood. Individuals are encouraged to confirm eligibility requirements before scheduling a blood donation to ensure they will not be deferred.

Where can blood donations be made?

Individuals interested in donating blood should call their local blood center to make an appointment. To find a local blood collection site and to schedule an appointment, please contact one of the following organizations:

- AABB: www.aabb.org; +1.301.907.6977
- America's Blood Centers: www.americasblood.org; +1.202.393.5725
- American Red Cross: www.redcrossblood.org; +1.800.RED CROSS (+1.800.733.2767)
- Armed Services Blood Program: www.militaryblood.dod.mil; +1.703.681.8024