



Red Cross Supporter Update

March 31, 2020

American Red Cross Faces Severe Blood Shortage As Coronavirus Outbreak Threatens Availability of Nation's Supply

Over 8,000 Red Cross blood drives have been canceled across the country due to coronavirus concerns, resulting in some 250,000 fewer blood donations.

The American Red Cross now faces a severe blood shortage due to an unprecedented number of blood drive cancellations in response to the coronavirus outbreak. Healthy individuals are needed now to donate to help patients counting on lifesaving blood.

Individuals can schedule an appointment to give blood with the American Red Cross by visiting www.RedCrossBlood.org or calling 1-800-RED-CROSS.

As the coronavirus pandemic has grown here in the U.S., blood drive cancellations have grown at an alarming rate. To date, over 8,000 Red Cross blood drives have been canceled across the country due to concerns about congregating at workplaces, college campuses and schools amidst the coronavirus outbreak. These cancellations have resulted in over 250,000 fewer blood donations. More than 80 percent of the blood the Red Cross collects comes from drives held at these locations.

Volunteer donors are the only source of blood for those in need

The Red Cross expects the number of cancellations to continue, which is causing heightened concern for blood collection organizations and hospitals across the country. This blood shortage could impact patients who need surgery, victims of car accidents and other emergencies, or patients suffering from cancer.

"I am looking at the refrigerator that contains only one day's supply of blood for the hospital," said Dr. Robertson Davenport, director of Transfusion Medicine at Michigan Medicine in Ann Arbor. "The hospital is full. There are patients who need blood and cannot wait."

"As a nation, this is a time where we must take care of one another including those most vulnerable among us in hospitals," said Gail McGovern, president and chief executive officer, American Red Cross. "One of the most important things people can do right now during this public health emergency is to give blood. If you are healthy and feeling well, please make an appointment to donate as soon as possible."

The Red Cross is Committed to Blood Drive Safety

“We understand why people may be hesitant to come out for a blood drive but want to reassure the public that blood donation is a safe process, and that we have put additional precautions in place at our blood drives to protect the health and safety of our donors and staff,” said McGovern.

The Red Cross has implemented new measures to ensure blood drives and donation centers are even safer for our donors and staff, including:

- Checking the temperature of staff and donors *before* entering a drive to make sure they are healthy
- Providing hand sanitizer for use before the drive, as well as throughout the donation process
- Spacing beds, where possible, to follow social distancing practices between blood donors, and
- Increasing enhanced disinfecting of surfaces and equipment.

At each blood drive and donation center, Red Cross employees already follow thorough safety protocols to help prevent the spread of any type of infection, including:

- Wearing gloves and changing gloves with each donor
- Routinely wiping down donor-touched areas
- Using sterile collection sets for every donation, and
- Preparing the arm for donation with an aseptic scrub

There is no data or evidence that this coronavirus can be transmitted by blood transfusion, and there have been no reported cases of transfusion transmission for any respiratory virus including this coronavirus worldwide.

Blood Donation Process

To donate blood, individuals need to bring a blood donor card or driver's license or two other forms of identification that are required at check-in. Individuals who are 17 years of age in most states (16 with parental consent where allowed by state law), weigh at least 110 pounds and are in generally good health may be eligible to donate blood. High school students and other donors 18 years of age and younger also must meet certain height and weight requirements.

Donors can also save up to 15 minutes at the blood drive by completing a RapidPass®. With RapidPass®, donors complete the pre-donation reading and health history questionnaire online, on the day of donation, from a mobile device or computer. To complete a RapidPass®, follow the instructions at [RedCrossBlood.org/RapidPass](https://www.RedCrossBlood.org/RapidPass) or use the [Red Cross Blood Donor App](#).

Please consider any methods to help encourage blood donations within your network.

Please read the message below from the head of the American Red Cross Biomedical Services regarding **Convalescent Plasma**.

The following message is from Chris Hrouda, president of Biomedical Services:

Over the past few weeks, we have seen the coronavirus spread rapidly across the United States and around the world—impacting our lives in ways we never expected. Yet, despite the chaos and disruption, the nation has come together-- taking aggressive action to fight back to help treat those in need.

On March 24, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced a new initiative to collect plasma, referred to as convalescent plasma, from those who have recovered from this new coronavirus (COVID-19) to treat patients with serious or immediately life-threatening COVID-19 infections. Convalescent plasma has antibodies specific to COVID-19 making it ideal for these patients. I am proud to share that the American Red Cross will be playing a critical role in helping to execute this new development in the fight against COVID-19.

Though we know this treatment is still experimental, the Red Cross believes it is necessary to enable rapid access to potentially lifesaving care for the most seriously ill. We will be collecting and distributing plasma from carefully screened and recovered COVID-19 patients. COVID-19 positive individuals are not eligible to participate.

At this time, the Red Cross is working closely with the FDA to develop a process to identify and qualify individuals who have recovered from the virus and have the necessary antibodies to participate in this effort. The first step in this process is establishing a new webpage on [RedCrossBlood.org](https://RedCrossBlood.org/plasma4covid), where these individuals will be asked to give their contact information and answer questions to help determine initial eligibility. The link for potential donors is RedCrossBlood.org/plasma4covid. The Red Cross will then follow-up with prospective candidates to confirm eligibility and participation.

The safety of our staff, donors and ultimate recipients remains our top priority. Only those individuals who have recovered fully from COVID-19 are eligible to donate therapeutic plasma, which means they have no detectable virus and are not infectious to others.

To learn more, please visit RedCrossBlood.org/plasma4covid.

I look forward to giving updates with more details about this lifesaving initiative in the weeks to come.