

## **Donating blood during a pandemic**

Why it is crucial, and how to do it safely

Despite lockdown measures being in place to curb the spread of SARS-CoV-2, it is crucial that people still donate blood

COVID-19's sudden emergence and rapid spread across the world have fundamentally changed how societies function, requiring radical restrictions on movement.

These lockdowns aim to limit the transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus to reduce both the number of people dying after becoming infected and the strain on overloaded intensive care units.

However, while staying at home as much as possible is important, it is also crucial that many essential workers can leave their homes safely. These individuals include care workers in hospitals and the community, public service workers, and people working in food industries, as well as anyone else who plays a key role in helping the country keep functioning, whether there is a pandemic or not.

### **Donating blood**

As well as these key workers, other people who are crucial for maintaining the health of a population are those who donate blood.

A country's blood supply is integral to supporting people in a critical condition. According to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), blood transfusions are necessary if a person loses too much blood due to injury or during a surgical procedure. They can also be necessary if a person's body is not producing blood properly.

Depending on the reason why a person needs a blood transfusion, the NHLBI highlight that it is possible to give four different types of blood product during transfusion: whole blood, red blood cells, platelets, or plasma.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), blood transfusions are lifesaving procedures that occur every day in hospitals. There are a number of blood donors who are crucial for the country's blood supply.

Without ready access to supplies of blood, many people would not be able to undergo lifesaving blood transfusion procedures.

## “Dramatic reduction” in blood donations during lockdown

As with all the other resources that a country depends on, supply and demand largely determine its blood reserves. At a local level, if there is a significant accident causing a loss of blood from many people, blood reserves may become stretched as the demand increases.

Conversely, too few people donating blood can put pressure on the blood reserves, as the supply of blood cannot meet the demand.

The physical distancing policies that authorities have implemented during the SARSCoV-2 outbreak have put severe pressure on the supply of blood.

According to Dr. Peter Marks, Director of the FDA’s Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, “[t]he COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented challenges to the blood supply. Donor centers have experienced a dramatic reduction in donations due to the implementation of physical distancing and the cancellation of blood drives.”

Dr. Marks describes people who donate blood as “part of our critical infrastructure industries.” Despite the physical lockdown measures, it is crucial that people continue to donate blood.

It is the responsibility of local governments to encourage people to donate blood and to help them do it in a safe way that does not significantly increase their risk of getting or passing on SARS-CoV-2.

In short, the benefits of giving blood at this critical stage of the pandemic far outweigh the negative consequences of the increased number of people traveling from their homes.  
Donating blood safely

While it is crucial that people continue to donate blood, doing so safely is, of course, also important.

As with other people who are critical to the functioning of society and thus unable to stay at home, people who donate blood should adhere to physical distancing policies when traveling outside, wear masks in areas where they are unable to keep 6 feet apart from other people, and frequently wash their hands to reduce their chances of catching or spreading the virus.

As Dr. Marks points out, blood donation centers are ideally placed to manage the donations of blood safely during the pandemic, as they are highly skilled in infection control practices.

In Dr. Marks’ words, “[b]lood donation centers always take steps to prevent staff and donors

who are not feeling well or who have a fever from reaching the donor area, and they are now taking additional social distancing precautions wherever possible, consistent with the President's Coronavirus Guidelines.”

“Donating blood is safe and takes only a little of your time. At many blood donation centers, those who are interested in donating can make an appointment to minimize the time it takes to donate blood. Centers can arrange to call a donor's mobile phone when they're ready for the donor to come in.”

For blood and plasma collection facilities on how to operate safely during the pandemic, here are some recommendations:

- maintaining good respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette
- following hand hygiene practices
- cleaning and disinfecting surfaces regularly
- placing seats 6 feet apart in waiting areas and the collection area
- ensuring that donation center workers do not work if they have COVID-19 symptoms
- making sure that all staff are aware of the latest policies and safety procedures in response to the pandemic.

*Source: [www.medicalnewstoday.com](http://www.medicalnewstoday.com)*