

3-16-2020

Dear Members of our Community:

The Coronavirus-19 (COVID-19) outbreak that is ongoing in the United States (U.S.) and around the world is challenging across many domains, but is particularly demanding on 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. Public health officials are expecting regions, and potentially the nation, to see increased disease spread through community contact accompanied by growing public concern fueled by media attention. A key strategy to combat a pandemic is appropriate public health measures such as social distancing, cancelation of public events and gathering, expanded use of teleworking, and closures of schools and child-care facilities. While these strategies are appropriate public health measures, the unintended consequence is a dramatic reduction in the number of healthy individuals donating blood.

Maintaining a safe and adequate blood supply during this epidemic is a component of the overall public health objective of limiting mortality and morbidity from COVID-19. Additionally, while efforts to reduce non-essential blood component use, such as limiting elective surgeries, can reduce the strain on the blood supply during a pandemic, the need for blood components remains. Cancer patients, those with blood disorders, trauma victims, and others continue to require blood components.

Blood must be regularly collected from donors in the community, it cannot be created in the lab. 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.** Pursuant to pandemic plans already developed by Western KY Regional Blood Center, further enhanced infection control procedures could be implemented as our local health departments deem additional precautions are appropriate.

It is essential that any call for social distancing measures explicitly exclude blood donation activities. As a result of the COVID-19 outbreaks, businesses, schools, and the public have responded with various efforts to reduce fear and the spread of the disease. Already we have seen businesses implementing or expanding telecommuting and in some cases restricting or closing campuses. Schools and universities, which are currently large sources of donors, are similarly developing virtual alternatives to classes. Churches and other community organizations are also canceling gathering. While these efforts are intended to limit the spread of COVID-19, it has also resulted in the unintended consequence of many canceled blood drives. These donors lost to drive cancelation are exacerbated by the fact that the large proportion of current blood donors are older Americans. Currently, about 60 percent of blood donations are made by

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

people over 40 years old, and of these, 75 percent come from people over the age of 50. This is the same demographic at greatest risk for contracting a severe form of COVID-19, resulting in greater urging to avoid social contact. All of these factors are combining to form the perfect storm with the potential to decimate the blood supply.

The blood community has established mechanisms to ensure a safe and robust blood supply, however, COVID-19 is a unique disaster in its potential for dramatic public health impacts in multiple areas simultaneously. The blood industry is unique. While a competitive market exists, when a disaster strikes the blood community comes together and ensures any impacted area is supported with donations from unaffected areas. COVID-19 has the potential to be the first challenge where these mitigation efforts may not be enough to support a robust blood supply unless efforts are undertaken to ensure healthy eligible individuals are donating blood. 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. We ask for your support to encourage all healthy individuals to donate blood and to ensure efforts to mitigate the spread of disease, such as social distancing, are explicitly not implicating blood donation efforts.

The U.S. is on the verge of a serious blood shortage that will lead to blood rationing and triage resulting in canceled elective surgeries and worse, a lack of blood for ongoing support of patients who rely on the generosity of donors every day. If additional information or you wish to discuss further, please contact Janet Howard, Vicki Ellis or Robbin Shively at 888.684.9292.

Janet Howard Vicki Ellis

Robbin Shively

CEO Director of Recruitment, Owensboro

Director of Recruitment, Hopkinsville