



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **Department of Health Stresses Statewide Need for Blood Donations**

The Pennsylvania Department of Health Acting Physician General Dr. Denise Johnson and officials from five major blood banks across the state today highlighted the importance of donating blood, as the number of volunteers who regularly donate blood has dramatically decreased due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Leaders of the Miller-Keystone Blood Center in the Lehigh Valley, the American Red Cross Greater Pennsylvania Region, the Central Pennsylvania Blood Bank, Vitalant Blood Center based in Pittsburgh, and the Community Blood Bank of Northwest PA and Western NY joined the Department of Health to emphasize the statewide need for blood donations.

“There is a critical shortage of blood across Pennsylvania and the nation, as COVID-19 has prevented some donors from giving blood and impacted the scheduling of blood drives,” Acting Physician General Dr. Denise Johnson said. “Blood is essential for surgeries, traumatic injuries, cancer treatment and chronic illnesses, which is why it is so important for individuals to go to their local blood bank or find a blood drive near them and donate. An adequate supply of blood is essential to ensure Pennsylvanians have safe, continuous access to the highest quality of health care.”

Blood donations are a critical and integral part of medical care. Many patients who have major surgeries will need a blood transfusion to replace blood lost during their procedure. Blood transfusions are also used for patients who have serious injuries from car crashes or natural disasters, and people with illnesses that cause anemia, like leukemia or kidney disease, will often receive blood transfusions.

“As the supplier of 40 percent of our nation’s blood supply, and in solidarity with all Pennsylvania blood collection organizations, the American Red Cross stands with the Pennsylvania Department of Health in asking every Pennsylvanian feeling healthy and well to make an appointment to donate today,” Dr. John Nobiletti, Medical Director for the American Red Cross Greater Pennsylvania Region said.

“Across the U.S., the demand for blood has increased between five percent and 25 percent compared to the same time period in 2019,” Dr. Kip Kuttner, Medical Director for the Miller-Keystone Blood Center said. “This reinforces the critical need for increased blood donations now.”

“A significant factor contributing to blood shortages is a decrease in the amount of people entering the field of phlebotomy,” Patrick Bradley, President and CEO of Central Pennsylvania Blood Bank said. “There is a high demand for these positions as it requires a unique skillset. To help with this challenge, Pennsylvania blood centers provide the necessary education and training to begin a career in phlebotomy.”

Approximately 36,000 units of red blood cells are needed every day in the United States. The type of blood most commonly requested and used by hospitals is type O. Type O blood can be transfused to patients with any blood type, which is why it is often used in emergencies when there is not enough time to determine a patient’s blood type.

“Blood banks have a constant urgent need for O-negative blood,” Joseph E. Kiss, Medical Director of Clinical Apheresis and Blood Services at Vitalant Blood Center said. “Because O-negative blood is universally compatible for patients with any blood type, it is almost always in short supply. In an effort to improve the availability of this blood group for transfusion patients, Vitalant is working with hospitals to closely monitor utilization of Rh-negative inventory. One of our goals is to develop policies for patients to be given Rh-positive blood to avoid depletion of the O-negative supply.”

“We can no longer assume that blood will be there when it is needed, or that someone else will step up to donate it,” Deanna Renaud, Executive Director for the Community Blood Bank of NWPA & WNY said. “An adequate blood supply is the responsibility of everyone living in a community. Every donation matters.”

All blood types are needed to make sure there is a reliable supply for patients. Most individuals are eligible to donate blood in Pennsylvania if they are:

- In good health;
- 16 years old or older; and
- Weigh a minimum of 120 pounds.

To donate blood, make an appointment with a local blood bank or visit an upcoming blood drive in your community.

For more information on blood donation, visit the Department of Health’s website at [www.health.pa.gov](http://www.health.pa.gov) or follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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