Talking Points/FAQ

*COVID-19*

March 30, 2020

**Talking Points**

**Thanks to the many who gave blood and scheduled upcoming appointments over the past couple of weeks, the American Red Cross currently has a sufficient blood supply to meet patient needs. We encourage individuals to keep scheduled blood donation appointments, and new blood donation appointments be made for the weeks ahead.**

* There remains an ongoing need for platelet donations due to their short, five-day shelf life.
* In times of crisis, the Red Cross is fortunate to witness the best of humanity as people roll up a sleeve to help those in need. We greatly appreciate the generosity of the public to help stock hospital shelves during this uncertain time.
* There is no known end date in this fight against coronavirus and the Red Cross needs the help of blood and platelet donors and blood drive hosts to maintain a sufficient blood supply for weeks to come.

**Each Red Cross blood drive and donation center follows the highest standards of safety and infection control. To ensure the health of employees, volunteers and staff, precautions include:**

* Checking temperatures 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.
* Following social distancing between donors including entry, donation and refreshment areas.
* Routinely disinfecting surfaces, equipment and donor-touched areas.
* Wearing gloves, and changing gloves often.
* Using sterile collection sets and an aseptic scrub for every donation.

**Blood donation is essential to ensuring the health of our communities. The need for blood is constant, and volunteer donors are the only source of blood for those in need.**

* Every day patients rely on lifesaving blood transfusions including those who need surgery, victims of car accidents and other emergencies, or patients suffering from cancer.
* Right now, people are following public health guidance to keep their families safe—and that includes contributing to a readily available supply of blood for hospitals.
* There is no evidence and there are no reported cases of the coronavirus—or any respiratory virus—being transmitted by a blood transfusion.
* This is the time to take care of one another. If you are healthy and feeling well, please make an appointment to donate mid-April and afterby using the Red Cross Blood Donor App, visiting [RedCrossBlood.org](http://www.redcrossblood.org/) or calling 1-800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767).

**Even during a pandemic, other disasters don’t stop—and neither does the work of the Red Cross.**

* We continue to offer essential courses such as resuscitation, CPR and first aid—which helps medical professionals and other workers stay current on their certifications.
* Our brave volunteers are still responding to disasters like home fires, tornadoes and earthquakes, so impacted families receive help and hope—even during these trying times.
* The American public can help “flatten the curve” by practicing social distancing, staying home as much as possible, washing their hands, and taking other precautions to stay healthy.
* Help the American Red Cross deliver its lifesaving mission nationwide during this public health emergency by donating at redcross.org.

**Frequently Asked Questions**

**GENERAL**

**Q: How is the Red Cross responding to this virus around the globe?**

**A:** Overseas, Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers are helping communities cope with the virus through a variety of actions, such as Red Cross doctors staffing quarantine facilities in Japan and Red Cross volunteers offering practical help to at-risk adults in the Netherlands. For its part, the American Red Cross has made a $720,000 contribution to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to help mitigate the spread of this virus through community-based health and hygiene promotion, access to basic services and fighting stigma. The funds can be used to expand case detection, surveillance and contact tracing, among other activities. The American Red Cross is also providing data expertise to the global Red Cross Red Crescent network and has deployed a communications expert to bring attention to humanitarian needs and combat rumors about the virus.

**Q: What steps are being taken to keep people safe during in-person first aid and CPR classes?**

**A:** The health and safety of participants and instructors is always our top priority. We are closely monitoring and following the latest COVID-19 guidance from the CDC and local public health authorities. Currently, their guidance supports continuing classes if social distancing practices are implemented.

Students are being notified that they should not attend class if they are having any signs of illness (cough, runny nose, fever or other symptoms) or have had the symptoms in the last 24 hours. If so, they should call1-800-RED CROSS and select menu option #3, to cancel and receive a refund.

As part of our normal protocols, training equipment, manikins and class materials are cleaned and disinfected prior to student use. To help keep people safe, we are also using social distancing practices in the classroom and each student will have their own individual manikin. In addition, we’ve modified our courses so there is no physical contact with other students, and students will wear gloves while practicing skills.

**Q: Is the American Red Cross accepting financial donations for the COVID-19 outbreak?**

**A:** Yes, theAmerican Red Cross needs financial donations to help the organization continue to deliver its lifesaving mission nationwide due to this public health emergency. Donations will be used to ensure that the Red Cross can maintain a sufficient supply of blood to help patients in need and prevent any shortages. Donations will also be used to make sure the Red Cross is able to provide critical relief services to people affected by disasters big and small.

To donate to help the American Red Cross continue to deliver its lifesaving mission nationwide due to this public health emergency, visit redcross.org, call 1-800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767) or text the word CORONAVIRUS to 90999. You can also donate by check by writing “Coronavirus Outbreak” in the memo line, and mailing it to your local Red Cross chapter or to the American Red Cross, P.O. Box 37839, Boone, IA 50037-0839.

**Q: How will donations to the coronavirus outbreak be used?**

**A:** Financial donations designated for the coronavirus outbreak will help the American Red Cross continue to deliver its lifesaving mission nationwide due to this public health emergency.

Donations designated to the coronavirus outbreak will be used to ensure that the Red Cross can maintain a sufficient supply of blood to help patients in need and prevent any shortages. This may include adding more staff and resources to ensure we have enough people to collect vital blood products for hospital patients in need across the country. Donations may also be used to invest in the creation of a national public service campaign to raise awareness and inspire the public to donate blood.

In addition, donations will ensure that due to this coronavirus outbreak, the Red Cross is able to provide critical relief services to people affected by disasters big and small. This includes equipping and training volunteers and staff during this outbreak to safely provide food, shelter, comfort and relief supplies to people affected by disasters of all types. Donations may also be used to invest in technology and training to make sure we can provide counseling, financial assistance and other relief services virtually.

**Q: Will coronavirus outbreak donations be used to support people who are ill with COVID-19?**

**A:** Financial donations for the coronavirus outbreak will help the American Red Cross continue to deliver its lifesaving mission nationwide due to this public health emergency. Donations will not be used to provide medical care or reimburse expenses related to testing or treatment for those with COVID-19. Donations will also not be used to supplement lost wages due to COVID-19 outbreaks.

**Q: Does the American Red Cross need donations of material goods to respond to COVID-19?**

**A:** We understand that people want to help, and we appreciate those offers of support. At this time, the American Red Cross is not accepting donations of material goods (masks, gowns, etc.) specific to the coronavirus pandemic from the general public.

**BLOOD DRIVE CANCELLATIONS**

**Q: How many blood drives have been canceled due to coronavirus?**

**A:** As the coronavirus pandemic has grown here in the U.S., we have seen blood drive cancellations grow at an alarming rate. As of March 27, more than 10,000 Red Cross blood drives have been canceled across the country due to coronavirus concerns, resulting in some 300,000 fewer blood donations.

While the Red Cross currently has a sufficient blood supply, there are many uncertainties with the coronavirus outbreak and we encourage people to schedule appointments for the weeks to come to help ensure an ongoing stable supply. We greatly appreciate the generosity of the public to help stock hospital shelves for patients in need. As experts have emphasized, there is no certain end date in this fight against coronavirus and the Red Cross needs the help of blood donors and blood drive hosts to maintain a sufficient blood supply for weeks to come.

**Q: How many blood drives have been canceled in <STATE> due to coronavirus?**

A: Here in <STATE>, we have had <##> blood drives canceled due to coronavirus concerns, resulting in <###> uncollected blood donations. While the Red Cross has a sufficient blood supply for the time being, there are many uncertainties with the coronavirus outbreak and we encourage people to schedule appointments for the weeks to come to help ensure an ongoing stable supply.Together, we must ensure a readily available blood supply for patients who are counting on us.

**Q: Why have there been so few blood drives canceled in <STATE> compared to the rest of the country?
A:** There have been a few areas like <STATE> that have yet to see this drastic increase in blood drive cancellations. And that’s a good thing – it puts <STATE> in a position to help the rest of the country to ensure patients receive lifesaving blood. With our national inventory, the Red Cross has the ability to provide blood wherever and whenever its needed.

**Q: What states or areas of the country are people canceling blood drives?**

**A:** We have experienced cancellations across the country. Cancellations are not limited to specific geographies with increased risk or community spread. Right now, the Red Cross asks blood drive hosts to keep hosting blood drives across the country to ensure we have a readily available blood supply for patients who are counting on us.

**Q: Has the Red Cross provided blood to other blood providers due to coronavirus shortages?**

**A:** During this challenging time, the Red Cross has provided approximately 100 blood products to a blood provider in Washington state and a small number of platelets to the military. As a steward of the nation’s blood supply, during disasters and times of shortage, the Red Cross coordinates with other blood collection organizations, as well as the AABB Disaster Task Force, to ensure patient needs continue to be met.

**Q: Why are blood drive hosts canceling their Red Cross blood drives?**

**A:** Blood drive hosts have canceled their blood drives as these locations temporarily close and more people are being told to work remotely and practice social distancing. Red Cross blood drive hosts play a critical role in maintaining a sufficient blood supply, and we ask that hosts please continue to hold their upcoming blood drive in communities. Blood drives provide opportunities for people to give, and they are critically needed right now to keep the blood supply stable during this challenging time.

**Q. Why are blood drive hosts so important to the blood supply?**

**A.** Because more than 80 percent of blood donations are made at blood drives hosted by volunteers, blood drive partners play a vital role in helping the American Red Cross ensure blood is available for patients at about 2,500 hospitals across the country.

**Q: I heard the Red Cross has canceled a local community event. Will the Red Cross be canceling blood drives too?**

**A:** Donations of time, blood and money are essential to the Red Cross mission. As our nation copes with this growing pandemic, we are taking every precaution to keep communities and our staff members healthy. As such, and out of an abundance of caution, we postponed <INSERT EVENT>. While this decision was a difficult one, we are confident that the affected donors will continue funding the Red Cross’s lifesaving work now and in the future.

Another step we are taking in response to the coronavirus is to protect our nation’s blood supply. Red Cross blood drives are essential to maintaining a readily available supply for hospital patients. Continuing to host blood drives is critical to public health preparedness and is our responsibility during this time of uncertainty. Our teams ensure a safe and healthy environment in which to donate blood and we encourage all healthy individuals to step up and help us meet the need.

**Q: How does this virus outbreak compare to other outbreaks or emergencies?**

**A:** This is a unique situation with an unprecedented number of blood drive cancellations. Unlike disasters, this pandemic affects a much larger geography and has no known end date.

**Q:** **There aren’t any confirmed cases yet in <INSERT STATE>. What impact will our local donors make?**

**A:** As a national network, the Red Cross has the ability to move blood around the country to wherever and whenever it is needed most. Donations in areas like <INSERT STATE> play a critical role in helping ensure the Red Cross maintains a sufficient supply for those in need of lifesaving blood products.

**Q: I tried to make an appointment to donate blood, but there are no blood drives near me?/I showed up to give but there was a long wait/no appointments available?
A:** Thanks to all those who gave blood and have appointments scheduled in the coming days and weeks, the American Red Cross currently has a sufficient blood supply to meet patient needs. Donors are urged to keep previously scheduled appointments while new appointments are encouraged for mid-April and after.

Unfortunately, as drives are canceled during this outbreak there may be fewer locations where individuals can give. Workplaces, college campuses and schools are canceling their blood drives as these locations temporarily close and more people are being told to work remotely and practice social distancing. We apologize for any inconvenience.

Please do not feel discouraged if there is not an immediate appointment available – *patients still need you.* As experts have emphasized, there is no certain end date in this fight against coronavirus and the Red Cross needs the help of blood donors and blood drive hosts to maintain a sufficient blood supply for weeks to come.

**Q: I can’t make an appointment because there are long call wait times. Why is this?
A:** We apologize if you are experiencing long wait times. The incredible generosity of the public, especially when coinciding with national news coverage or public health announcements, has caused our systems, including our customer service center, to slow down.

Please do not feel discouraged if there is not an immediate appointment available – *patients still need you.* As experts have emphasized, there is no certain end date in this fight against coronavirus and the Red Cross needs the help of blood donors and blood drive hosts to maintain a sufficient blood supply for weeks to come.

**Q: How does the coronavirus outbreak affect volunteer needs for Biomedical Services?**

**A:** The American Red Cross continues to need volunteers to carry out our mission critical services. Volunteers are needed to support the collection and delivery of lifesaving blood. To learn more about volunteer opportunities in your area, visit [www.redcross.org/volunteer](http://www.redcross.org/volunteer).

**BLOOD DONATION AND BLOOD DRIVE SAFETY**

**Q: Is it safe to give blood right now?**

**A:** We want to emphasize that at each blood drive and donation center, Red Cross employees already follow the highest standards of safety and infection control. The Red Cross has also implemented additional precautions to ensure the safety of our donors and staff during this outbreak. Healthy individuals are needed to donate now to help patients counting on lifesaving blood. The need for blood is constant, and volunteer donors are the only source of blood for those in need of transfusions.

**Q: What safety precautions are in place at Red Cross blood drives to protect staff and donors?**

**A:** The Red Cross asks potential donors who may have any risk factors to postpone and donate at a later time. The Red Cross only collects blood from individuals who are healthy and feeling well at the time of donation.

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 often
* Routinely disinfecting donor-touched areas
* Using sterile collection sets for every donation, and
* Preparing the arm for donation with an aseptic scrub.

We understand why people may be hesitant to come out for a blood drive, but want to reassure the public that we have implemented additional precautions to ensure the safety of our employees, volunteers and donors, including:

* Checking the temperature of staff and donors *before* entering a drive to make sure they are healthy.
* Providing hand sanitizer for use before entering the drive, as well as throughout the donation process.
* Following social distancing practices between donors including donor beds, as well as waiting and refreshment areas.
* Increasing enhanced disinfecting of surfaces and equipment.
* Emphasizing the importance of appointments to help manage the flow of donors at drives.

These mitigation measures will help ensure staff and donor safety in reducing contact with those who may potentially have this, or any, respiratory infection.

**Q: What *new* safety protocols has the Red Cross put in place?**

**A:** The Red Cross already follows thorough safety protocols to help prevent the spread of any type of infection each day. In response to this coronavirus, we’ve implemented additional precautionary measures out of an abundance of caution, including:

* Checking the temperature of staff and donors *before* entering a drive to make sure they are healthy
* Providing hand sanitizer for use before entering the drive, as well as throughout the donation process
* Following social distancing practices between donors including donor beds, as well as waiting and refreshment areas.
* Increasing enhanced disinfecting of surfaces and equipment.
* Emphasizing the importance of appointments to help manage the flow of donors at drives.

We are also looking at staggering donor appointments further apart to reduce the number of people at a drive at any one time. These mitigation measures will help ensure staff and donor safety in reducing contact with those who may potentially have this, or any, respiratory infection.
 **Q: I don’t like the oral thermometers. Can’t you use the forehead ones?
A:** The Red Cross has ordered infrared forehead thermometers to help with the pre-screening process and expects to have them in place at our blood drives and centers in early April. We still plan to use digital oral thermometers during the health history at this time.

**Q: Is it safe for older people to come out and donate?**

**A:** In many areas of the country, public officials are asking older individuals to limit public interaction as much as possible. We encourage all donors to follow the guidance of their local health officials. Please note, however, that our Red Cross blood drives have the highest standards of safety and infection control—and do not fall in the category of “mass gatherings”. Depending on the severity of the outbreak in a particular community and an older donor's particular circumstances, some older donors may choose to postpone their donation appointment to a later date.

**Q: Is the Red Cross collecting plasma from recovered COVID-19 patients to help treat current COVID-19 patients?
A:** At this time, the American Red Cross is not recruiting or collecting plasma from recovered COVID-19 patients in order to treat current patients. We are working with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and other stakeholders to evaluate how we can participate in this important effort, by potentially utilizing our collection resources and scientific expertise to support the healthcare community and the public. Though this treatment is still experimental, the Red Cross believes that it is important to explore all potential and credible treatment options to help physicians who are caring for COVID-19 patients.

**Q: Should the public be worried about the health of the staff at blood drives and centers?**

**A:** We have implemented standard staff health assessments prior at all our blood donation sites to ensure staff are healthy the day of the drive.

**Q: Is the Red Cross prepared for a staffing shortage should more people contract this virus?**

**A:** We are hiring and training supplemental staff throughout the country to respond to potential staff call outs, sick leave and to operate newly added blood drives. We plan to augment our normal staffing model up to 10% in some geographies to ensure continuity within our blood drives during this challenging time.

**Q: Does the Red Cross have enough supplies during this outbreak to continue to collect blood?**

**A:** We are closely monitoring our supply inventory. Right now,in close collaboration with our partner vendors, we have secured the necessary equipment and supplies to ensure continuity of collections and manufacturing operations to minimize any disruption in service**.**

**Q. Have your staff members has contracted COVID-19?**
**A.** People from all walks of like—from world leaders and celebrities to office workers and Red Cross team members have contracted the virus. As the pandemic progresses, we can expect many more people in the U.S. and around the globe to be infected and we are hopeful that public efforts to slow or stop transmission will help to save lives.

The health and safety of our Red Cross staff remains our top priority, now more than ever, and we are taking all necessary precautionary measures to protect the health and well-being of our employees and volunteers, as well as the community at large.

We have ensured that all employees and volunteers follow the highest standards of safety and infection control. During these challenging times, our priority is to ensure our team members are safe, protected and supported by their colleagues and peers, so that they can continue to support and protect communities in need.

**Q: I heard a Red Cross employee has passed away due to coronavirus. Is this true?**

**A:**Yes, we recently learned that a Biomedical Services employee, who worked in a non-public facing function in St. Louis, passed away due to the coronavirus. Our hearts and greatest sympathies go out to the family and friends of this employee during this difficult time.

We want to note that this employee did not come into contact with donors or other members of the public as part of her job duties. We know this is an uncertain and trying time for many communities across the country. The Red Cross remains committed to supporting the community and those we serve as part of our lifesaving mission.

**Q: How can you assure the public that donating blood is safe if it requires people coming into close contact with each other?**

**A:** While no location can eliminate all risk during this outbreak, we want to emphasize that each Red Cross blood drive and donation center follows the highest standards of safety and infection control. We are taking every precaution to help ensure the safety of our employees, volunteers and donors.

Blood donations are essential to ensuring the health of the community and the Red Cross must continue to collect lifesaving blood donation to ensure we do not face another public health crisis. Every 2 seconds, someone in the U.S. needs a blood transfusion. That someone may be a car accident victim, a child battling cancer or a mother experiencing childbirth complications. The need for blood is constant, and will not pause during this coronavirus outbreak.

**FACE MASKS**

**Q: Why aren’t Red Cross staff wearing facemasks? I’m concerned about safety.
A:** All around the globe, healthcare workers are facing a shortage of crucial medical supplies during this coronavirus crisis—and American Red Cross team members are no exception.

While the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) does not require face masks for blood collection staff, with the increasing number of coronavirus cases in the U.S., we have secured basic face masks for our employees and volunteers who will be in close proximity with donors for a prolonged period of time. Staff will begin wearing masks sometime next week.

In the meantime, we remain vigilant in our current efforts to maintain social distancing whenever possible, taking the temperature of employees, volunteers and donors at drives, and following all safety protocols. At each blood drive and donation center, Red Cross employees already follow the [highest standards of safety and infection control.](https://www.redcrossblood.org/donate-blood/dlp/coronavirus--covid-19--and-blood-donation.html)

**Q: Why aren’t your staff using surgical or N95 masks?**

A: All around the globe, healthcare workers are facing a shortage of crucial medical supplies—and Red Cross team members are no exception. We are adapting to this challenge by utilizing the masks available to us and continuing to collect blood in order to save lives. Pandemics are, by their nature, unpredictable—so the Red Cross is using the resources available to ensure we deliver our humanitarian mission in this time of great need.

**Q: When do you plan to start using surgical masks?**

**A:** We are working to purchase surgical masks and will provide those as soon as we have acquired a sufficient quantity. At this time, we do not know when they will be available.

**Q: Can donors wear a mask at a blood drive?
A:** Yes, donors can wear their own mask at a blood drive. However, please note the Red Cross does not have face masks at blood drives or centers to provide.

**SOCIAL DISTANCING AND BLOOD DRIVES**

**Q: The public is being asked to avoid mass gatherings. Aren’t blood drives mass gatherings?
A:** Like a hospital, grocery store, or pharmacy, a blood drive is essential to ensuring the health of the community, and the Red Cross will continue to hold blood drives during this challenging time to help meet patient needs.

In fact, the U.S. surgeon general has said, “(Y)ou can still go out and give blood. We’re worried about potential blood shortages in the future. Social distancing does not have to mean social disengagement.” The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Food and Drug Administration have also issued statements encouraging blood donation for those who are well.

Blood drives are not considered “mass gatherings” as these are controlled events with trained staff and appropriate safety measures to protect donors and recipients. It’s important to note that at each blood drive and donation center, Red Cross employees follow thorough safety protocols to help prevent the spread of any type of infection.

**Q: Public officials are telling people to social distance and stay home, including “shelter in place” and “stay at home” orders, but you’re encouraging people to go out to give blood. Why are you contradicting that guidance?**

**A:** Blood donation is an "essential service" and "critical infrastructure" function as determined by the United States Department of Homeland Security and many other federal, state and local authorities. Healthy individuals can still donate in areas that have issued shelter in place declarations. The Red Cross is working closely with national and local officials, and recommends people leave home only for necessities—be they health care, groceries, or blood donation.

In fact, the U.S. surgeon general has said, “(Y)ou can still go out and give blood. We’re worried about potential blood shortages in the future. Social distancing does not have to mean social disengagement.” The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Food and Drug Administration have also issued statements encouraging blood donation for those who are well.

During a crisis, we see the best of humanity when people step up and help their neighbors. Amid this coronavirus emergency, we are asking individuals to take this responsibility seriously by practicing social distancing and donating blood. These two activities—which are not mutually exclusive—will go a long way in keeping community members healthy by slowing the spread of the virus and by ensuring that patients across the country receive lifesaving blood.

It’s important to note that blood drives have highest standards of safety and infection control. We are also spacing beds to follow social distancing practices between blood donors and are looking at staggering donor appointments further apart to reduce the number of people at a drive at any one time.

**Q: Will the Red Cross change its blood drives to adhere to the 10-person gathering rule? Are we planning on limiting the number of people who can be at a drive at the same time?**

**A:** It’s important to emphasize that blood drives are not mass gatherings and adhere to the highest standards of safety and infection control, and we have put additional safety precautions in place to limit the number of donors in any given space and follow social distancing practices.

Right now, we are emphasizing the importance of blood donation appointments to manage the flow of donors and we are also looking at staggering donor appointments further apart to reduce the number of people at a drive at any one time. At blood drives and donation centers, we may also ask individuals to wait in their cars until we are ready to start the blood donation process to further limit congregating in the arrival area.

Blood donation is an "essential service" and "critical infrastructure" function as determined by the United States Department of Homeland Security and many other federal, state and local authorities. Healthy individuals can still donate in areas that have issued shelter in place declarations. The Red Cross is working closely with national and local officials, and recommends people leave home only for necessities—be they health care, groceries, or blood donation.

**INVENTORY AND HOSPITAL IMPACT**

**Q: Is the Red Cross still experiencing a blood shortage due to coronavirus?**

**A:** The tremendous response of the American public has helped to replenish the blood supply from concerning low levels. We are now encouraging everyone with an appointment scheduled to keep it and new appointments to be scheduled mid-April and after. We are grateful for the continued support.

Healthy, eligible individuals can schedule a blood or platelet donation appointment at [RedCrossBlood.org](http://www.redcrossblood.org/) to help patients counting on lifesaving blood.Without continued blood and platelet donations, patients who need surgery, victims of car accidents and other emergencies, or patients suffering from cancer could be impacted.

**Q: How is coronavirus affecting blood donations?**

**A:** Thanks to all those who gave blood and have appointments scheduled in the coming days and weeks, the American Red Cross currently has a sufficient blood supply to meet patient needs. Donors are urged to keep previously scheduled appointments and new appointments are encouraged mid-April and after. We greatly appreciate the generosity of the public to help stock hospital shelves for patients in need. As experts have emphasized, there is no certain end date in this fight against coronavirus and the Red Cross needs the help of blood donors and blood drive hosts to maintain a sufficient blood supply for weeks to come.

Right now, people are following public health guidance to keep their families safe – and that includes contributing to a readily, available blood supply for hospitals. Blood products are perishable, and the only source of lifesaving blood for patients is volunteer blood donors.

**Q. How bad is the situation?**

**A.** This is a unique situation with an unprecedented number of blood drive cancellations. Unlike disasters, this pandemic affects a much larger geography and has no known end date.

**Q. What is the situation with the national and local Red Cross blood supply?**

**A.** Right now the blood supply is sufficient, but it fluctuates as donations come in and go out to help hospital patients every day of the week, and local blood supplies are similarly affected by fewer donations than what’s needed. Donors with appointments are urged to keep them and new donation appointments are encouraged mid-April and after. The Red Cross monitors the blood supply on a daily basis and works with hospital partners to prioritize needs.

It’s important to remember that blood is perishable and cannot be stockpiled in advance, but the Red Cross blood supply can be replenished when generous volunteers roll up a sleeve to give. As we have seen these past weeks, the American public comes together to support those in need during times of shortage and we need that support to continue during this unprecedented public health crisis.

**Q. Are you aware of any postponed or canceled surgeries due to the shortage?**

**A.** Right now, we are hearing that elective surgeries are being cancelled at many hospitals to reduce exposure and maintain resources in alignment with the American College of Surgeons recommendations.

**Q: How do canceled surgeries affect the blood supply? Does it solve the problem?**

A: Canceling elective surgeries will not eliminate the need for blood productions amid the coronavirus outbreak, but it does allow blood centers and hospitals to safeguard limited supplies for patients with emergent needs or requiring ongoing transfusion support for their care.

**Q: If more hospitals cancel surgeries, will that decrease the need for blood donations?**

A: The need for blood is constant, and will continue even as surgeries are canceled and the coronavirus outbreak grows. Patients who need emergency surgery, victims of car accidents, new moms with complications during childbirth, or patients suffering from cancer will continue to need lifesaving transfusions now and in the weeks to come.

**BLOOD PRODUCT SAFETY**

**Q: Can you contract the coronavirus through a blood transfusion?
A:** There is no evidence that this coronavirus or any other respiratory viruses are transmitted by blood transfusions. Nevertheless, out of an abundance of caution, the Red Cross is using a robust health screening process for blood donors in the U.S., which consists of a temperature check, blood pressure evaluation, hemoglobin level test and a series of questions designed to ensure that a donor is healthy enough to donate. If a donor develops any symptoms of illness within the days following donation, donations are immediately quarantined and not used for transfusion. It’s important to emphasize that there are 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.

**Q: Is the Red Cross deferring donors who have traveled to China or other countries that have local cases of this coronavirus?**

**A:** While there have been no reported cases worldwide of any respiratory virus, including COVID-19, being transmitted through a blood transfusion, the Red Cross has implemented new blood donation deferrals out of an abundance of caution. We ask that individuals postpone their donation for 28 days following:

* Travel to China and its special administrative regions, Hong Kong and Macau, as well as Iran, Italy and South Korea.
* Diagnosis of COVID-19, contact with a person who has or is suspected to have the virus.

As the situation evolves, the Red Cross may implement additional travel deferrals as needed.

**Q: Why is it a 28-day deferral when this coronavirus quarantine typically lasts 14 days?**

**A:** To ensure the safety of the blood supply, as well as our staff and donors, the deferral period often doubles the incubation period out of an abundance of caution. This 28-day deferral period for COVID-19 aligns with recommendations from AABB’s Transfusion Transmitted Disease Committee and FDA considerations.

**Q: How does the Red Cross define “contact” in its new deferral?**

**A:** The Red Cross coronavirus specific deferral for contact is defined as an individual who has cared for, lived with, or had direct contact with bodily fluids of a person with COVID-19 or someone suspected to have COVID-19.

**Q: Is there a test to screen the 2019 strain of coronavirus from blood donations?**

**A:** There is no test to screen blood donations for the coronavirus and other respiratory viruses. It’s important to emphasize that there are no data or evidence that this coronavirus can be transmitted by blood transfusions, and there have been no reported cases of transfusion transmission for any respiratory virus including this coronavirus worldwide.

**Q: Rumor has it that the Red Cross will test you/your blood for coronavirus when you donate. Is that true?**

**A:** The Red Cross does not have coronavirus tests to screen individuals or to screen blood donations for the coronavirus and other respiratory viruses. It’s important to emphasize that there are no data or evidence that this coronavirus can be transmitted by blood transfusions, and there have been no reported cases of transfusion transmission for any respiratory virus including this coronavirus worldwide.

**Q: Who should donors contact if they have a question about deferrals and eligibility?**

**A:** For more information or if donors have questions about deferrals and eligibility, please contact the Donor and Client Support Center at 1-866-236-3276.

**Q: What if a donor becomes sick with this coronavirus after donating?
A:** The Red Cross provides a call back number should a donor develop any symptoms of illness within the days following a donation. The Red Cross has updated our post-donation instructions to ask donors to report a post-donation diagnosis of the coronavirus infection as soon as possible to the Red Cross. Donations from such donors are immediately quarantined and not used for transfusion.

**Q: Why is the Red Cross quarantining/discarding units of people with symptoms or a positive test while also stating that it’s not transmissible via transfusion?**

**A:** Quarantining and discarding units for anyone who notifies the Red Cross they became sick following donation is a standard safety measure based upon the type of illness or symptoms. This process is out of an abundance of caution for blood recipients, even though there is no evidence globally that the coronavirus can be transmitted through a blood transfusion.

**Q: Is it true that people with Blood Type A are more vulnerable to the coronavirus?
A:** As this work did not undergo the scientific peer-reviewed process, the American Red Cross cannot verify these findings without more appropriately controlled studies.

**Q: If a serious shortage occurs, will the Red Cross change its eligibility to allow more people to give? Could men who have sex with men (MSM) be eligible to donate in that scenario?
A:** The Red Cross, like all blood collectors in the U.S., is required to follow the eligibility guidelines by the FDA. Although the Red Cross believes blood donation eligibility should not be determined by those that are based upon sexual orientation and has asked the FDA to consider reducing its deferral time for MSM, as a regulated organization, we cannot unilaterally enact changes concerning the MSM deferral policy.

We remain committed to working to achieve an inclusive and equitable blood donation process that treats all potential donors with equality and respect, and ensures that a safe, sufficient blood supply is readily available for patients in need.

**DISASTER RESPONSE EFFORTS**

**Q: What is the Red Cross doing to ensure you are still able to respond to disasters?**

**A:** Making sure that communities can turn to the Red Cross after a disaster is at the heart of what we do. We are closely monitoring the COVID-19 pandemic and are continuing to carry out our lifesaving mission. The Red Cross is working closely with public health officials to ensure the safety of local communities and our workforce, while still providing the help and hope they need should disaster strike.

**Q: Will the Red Cross continue to respond to home fires during a COVID-19 outbreak?**

**A:** The Red Cross plans to continue providing services for people who have experienced home fires, though responses may be supported virtually and by remote work where there are government directed social distancing or shelter-in-place measures in effect. Our physical presence may not be the same across the country, but the emergency help we provide will continue, including financial assistance as well as other resource like health and mental health services which may be provided over the phone.

**Q: Will the Red Cross open emergency shelters in response to disasters in U.S. communities experiencing a coronavirus outbreak?**

**A:**Yes, the Red Cross will continue to open disaster shelters at the request of emergency management and in coordination with local public health authorities. Our goal is to provide anyone in need after a disaster with a safe place to stay where they feel comfortable and welcomed. To help keep people safe, we will work with local officials to put in place additional precautions including:

* Setting up a health screening process for everyone coming into the shelter
* Creating an isolation care area in the shelter
* Providing masks, tissues and plastic bags throughout the shelter
* Following social distancing practices, as much as possible, by staggering meal times and adding extra spacing between cots, chairs, tables, etc.
* Providing additional handwashing stations, in addition to normal restroom facilities
* Increasing wellness checks to identify potential illness, including self-monitoring and checking temperatures of both shelter residents and staff
* Enhancing both cleaning and disinfecting practices throughout the shelter

**Q: Will the Red Cross open shelters in areas where the government has issued orders prohibiting congregate gatherings?**

**A:** The Red Cross will work with emergency management and local public health authorities to decide the best approach for sheltering in any disaster-affected area. Our goal is to provide anyone in need with a safe place to stay where they feel comfortable and welcomed, while also protecting the both the safety of our workforce and the people we serve.

**Q: What if a person refuses to be screened before entering a Red Cross shelter?**

**A:**Screening people before they enter a disaster shelter is a critical step in helping to protect both our workforce and the people we serve. The Red Cross shelter manager will handle these situations on a case-by-case basis; however, we will strictly enforce health screening protocols.

**Q: Are the protocols around media access in Red Cross shelters changing?**

**A:**No, media will still be granted limited access as long as they are escorted by a Red Cross worker. However, we will need to make some accommodations as part of social distancing guidelines. Our goal is to be both transparent and reassure the local community about the precautions we have taken to keep shelters safe, clean and comfortable.

**Q. Will the Red Cross support COVID-19 quarantine shelters or medical sites?**

**A.** Responding to this crisis is a team effort, and the Red Cross is working closely with community partners to help. Disasters won’t stop during the COVID-19 pandemic, which means our humanitarian mission is more important now than ever. To the extent our resources allow, and only when our government partners don’t have the capability, the Red Cross may help to support local quarantine and isolation facilities with cots, blankets and hygiene kits. In addition, we may be able to support other critical gaps in life-sustaining services such as providing or distributing meals connected with school closings due to COVID-19.

**Q: Will the Red Cross deliver food for people who are quarantined, living in senior facilities or can’t afford groceries?**

**A:** The Red Cross encourages everyone to have a two-week supply of food, water and medications on hand in case you have to stay in your home. In the event of a long-term government-ordered quarantine, the Red Cross will continue to work closely with local officials and community partners to identify the needs of those impacted and what support the Red Cross can provide, if requested. In the event of a disaster, the Red Cross will likely provide meals at emergency shelters and deliver food in some of the hardest-hit areas to ensure that no one goes hungry.

**Q. Will the Red Cross help to feed children who are out of school because of COVID-19?**

**A.** Hundreds of K-12 schools across the U.S. have been closed because of COVID-19 concerns, and many of those students depend on their school for free or reduced-price meals. To help ensure school children don’t go hungry, the Red Cross will work with local community partners, as requested, to deliver meals to students if we have the resources to do so.

**Q: Will the Red Cross handout personal protective equipment to the public?**

**A:** The CDC recommends wearing a facemask if you are sick. If you are not sick, the CDC does not recommend wearing a facemask and is instead encouraging those who are healthy to continue to take preventative health actions.

**Q: Why is the American Red Cross not donating face masks to hospitals and health care facilities?**

**A:** The Red Cross maintains a limited supply of face masks, clinical gloves and hand sanitizer for those in our workforce that perform specific tasks related to providing health services after disasters. At this time, these supplies are needed to protect our disaster responders in the event that emergency shelters need to be opened in communities with a coronavirus outbreak.