THE RED CROSS: A LIFESAVING MISSION SPANNING GENERATIONS

MARCH IS RED CROSS MONTH, CALLING TO ATTENTION THE IMPORTANCE OF DONATING BLOOD FOR THOSE IN NEED.
One of the nation’s premier humanitarian organizations, the American Red Cross prevents and alleviates human suffering in the face of emergencies by mobilizing the power of volunteers and the generosity of donors.

Clara Barton founded the Red Cross in 1881 and each year, the country celebrates “March is Red Cross Month”, which honors its historic humanitarian mission.

During World War II, the Red Cross initiated a national blood program at the military’s request that collected 13.3 million pints of blood for use by the armed forces. After the war, the Red Cross introduced the first nationwide civilian blood program that now supplies about 40 percent of the blood in this country.

Today, Red Cross Blood Services continues to play a critical role in our nation’s healthcare system, which is highlighted during Red Cross Month.

“Every two seconds, someone in the U.S. needs a blood transfusion,” said Shaun Gilmore, President of Biomedical Services at American Red Cross.

“That someone could be an accident or burn victim, heart surgery patient, organ transplant patient, or an individual receiving treatment for leukemia, cancer, or sickle cell disease. Our goal is to help ensure this lifesaving need is met whenever and wherever it arises.”
Last year the Red Cross collected more than 4.8 million units of blood from nearly 2.8 million volunteer donors. The goal of Red Cross Month is to bring attention to this work and encourage more donations.

These donations were then processed into approximately 6.8 million blood products for transfusion to meet the needs of patients at approximately 2,600 hospitals across the country.

Motivating Blood Donors to Fulfill a Constant Need
The need for blood is constant, and volunteer donors are the only source of blood and platelets for those in need of transfusions. Every day, the Red Cross must collect nearly 14,000 blood donations.

“Our Red Cross blood and platelet donors are truly amazing people who generously take time out of their day to help patients in need,” said Gilmore.

“That’s why over the past several years we have focused on improving their donation experience—developing the Red Cross Blood Donor App to make it easier to schedule an appointment and access information, as well as implementing RapidPass to help speed up the donation process by up to 15 minutes. We can’t fulfill this need alone, and are grateful to those who so graciously roll up a sleeve to give.”

Businesses and organizations across the country also play an important role in helping to meet patient needs by hosting blood drives for employees and the local community. Red Cross Month is the perfect time to do so.

Safeguarding the Blood Supply from Emerging Threats
The Red Cross continues to play a leading role in protecting the safety of blood donors and blood recipients. It has been among the first to help develop and implement testing for infectious diseases including HIV, hepatitis B and C viruses, West Nile virus, Trypanosoma cruzi, the agent of Chagas disease, and most recently Zika virus.

This past year, new concerns rapidly arose about Zika virus, a mosquito-spread disease reaching epidemic levels in Central and South
America. Working closely with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and blood industry partners, the Red Cross reacted with unprecedented speed to protect the blood supply from this evolving threat.

In March 2016, the Red Cross swiftly implemented the FDA required blood donation deferral for those who had traveled to or resided in countries with Zika virus, or had any exposure risks associated with the virus.

In June, before local transmission of Zika virus spread to the continental U.S., the Red Cross implemented a new screening test under an investigational study beginning in high-risk states that expanded to cover all states in which it collects blood in just a few months.

In addition to this significant scientific work, the Red Cross is also frequently the single major contributor to clinical trials to improve blood safety and operates the first-of-its-kind nationwide hemovigilance program to examine donor and patient adverse reactions.

“The Red Cross remains dedicated to providing the safest, most reliable blood products possible to patients in need. Hospital patients rely on blood to help them survive and thrive, and it’s a remarkable feeling to help contribute to their health and happiness,” said Gilmore.

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- SHAUN GILMORE, PRESIDENT OF BIOMEDICAL SERVICES AT AMERICAN RED CROSS

Participate in Red Cross Month and help save lives and schedule a donation today by using the Red Cross Blood Donor app, visiting redcrossblood.org, or calling 1-800-REDCROSS (1-800-733-2767). 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 have to meet certain height and weight requirements.