

Recommended Guidance for Preventing Spread of COVID-19 at Blood Drives

I. **Background**

SARS-CoV-2 is a novel coronavirus that has emerged and caused coronavirus disease (abbreviated as COVID-19). Public health experts continue to learn about SARS-CoV-2, but based on current data and similar coronaviruses, spread from person-to-person happens most frequently among close contact (those within about six feet) via respiratory droplets. Transmission of SAR-CoV-2 to persons from surfaces contaminated with the virus has not been documented yet, but current evidence suggests that SARS-CoV-2 may remain viable for hours to days on surfaces made from a variety of material. One primary measure discussed in this guidance will be cleaning of visibly dirty surfaces followed by disinfection – a best practice for prevention of COVID-19 and other viral respiratory illnesses at locations used for blood drives.

II. **Purpose**

This guidance provides recommendations for blood drive operations and the sites that are used for blood drive collections. Early evidence suggests that the virus that causes COVID-19 can spread more easily than the virus that causes seasonal influenza, and it appears that the COVID-19 disease is more deadly than seasonal influenza. There are some precautions that persons at blood drives can follow to help prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

III. **Symptoms**

Clinical features are fever or signs/symptoms of lower respiratory illnesses. Symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Human coronaviruses can sometimes cause lower-respiratory tract illnesses, such as pneumonia or bronchitis.

IV. **Transmission**

Human coronaviruses are most commonly spread from an infected person to others through:

- the air by coughing and sneezing;
- close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands;
- touching an object or surface with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes before washing your hands; and
- rarely, fecal contamination.

V. **Prevention**

To ensure that donors and staff at local blood drive collections are protected, please do the following:

- stay home if you are sick;
- wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds;
- use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water is not available. Soap and water should be used if the hands are visibly soiled;
- avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands;
- avoid close contact with people who are sick

There are currently no vaccines to protect against human coronavirus infection.

VI. **Preventative Actions to eliminate the spread of COVID-19**

- The Governor has ordered¹ that all public and private gatherings of 50 people or more are prohibited for the duration of the Gubernatorial Disaster Proclamation.
- Switch to and use disinfectant products that have been pre-approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for use against emerging viral pathogens.
- Disinfectants should be applied during routine cleaning all facility spaces.
- Clothing and linens may become contaminated with the virus, so it is also important to add disinfectant when washing laundry.
- Public spaces need to be cleaned frequently. If possible, provide disposable disinfectant wipes to disinfect surfaces. High touch areas should also be cleaned with disinfectant.
- Consult with the local or county health department to determine appropriate actions if a person comes to the blood drive collection who presents symptoms of COVID-19 disease, as well as how to respond if asked to quarantine. Public health officials at the state, federal, and local level have the legal authority to implement control measures to prevent the spread of communicable disease, such as isolation and quarantine, travel restrictions, and medical treatment.

VII. **The Coronavirus and Blood Donations**

Right now, Red Cross has an ongoing critical need for blood product donations as uncertainties remain during this coronavirus pandemic. Blood drives continue to be canceled at an alarming rate and patients need a sufficient blood supply throughout the many weeks of this crisis and beyond. Healthy individuals are needed to schedule an appointment to give in the days and weeks ahead to help patients counting on lifesaving blood, platelets or AB Elite plasma.

Giving blood is considered an essential community service. As part of our nation's critical infrastructure, healthy individuals can still donate in areas that have issued shelter in place

¹ Executive Order 2020-07 - <https://www2.illinois.gov/Documents/ExecOrders/2020/ExecutiveOrder-2020-07.pdf>

declarations. The Red Cross also urges organizations to maintain scheduled blood drives. Donating is a safe process and people should not hesitate to give or receive blood or platelets. Red Cross has implemented additional precautions to ensure the safety of donors and staff.

VIII. **Red Cross Donation Safety Protocols²**

The top priority of the Red Cross is the safety of our donors, volunteers, employees, and blood recipients. There are no data or evidence that this coronavirus can be transmissible by blood transfusion, and there have been no reported cases worldwide of transmissions for any respiratory virus including this coronavirus.

Donating blood is a safe process and people should not hesitate to give or receive blood, platelets, or AB Elite plasma. The Red Cross only collects blood from individuals who are healthy and feeling well at the time of donation – and who meet other eligibility requirements.

At each blood drive or donation center, Red Cross employees follow thorough safety protocols, including:

- Wearing gloves and changing them often
- Wiping down donor-touched areas after every collection
- Using sterile collection sets for every donation
- Preparing the arm for donation with aseptic scrub
- Conducting donor assessments to ensure that donors are healthy and well on day of donation

Red Cross has also increased their vigilance concerning some of these safety protocols including:

- Enhanced disinfecting of equipment
- Providing hand sanitizer for use before entering and throughout the donation appointment
- Temperature checks before presenting donors enter the blood drive or donation center
- Spacing beds, where possible, to follow social distancing practices between donors
- During this time, blankets typically used by platelet, Power Red and AB Elite donors at Red Cross blood donation centers will be laundered after each use, which may limit the availability. Donors are encouraged to bring their own blankets, but electric blankets and heating pads are not permitted.

To ensure staff are healthy each day, Red Cross has implemented standard staff health assessments prior to all blood drives. Only eligible and healthy people are allowed to give

² Source: What to know about the Coronavirus and Blood Donation - <https://www.redcrossblood.org/donate-blood/dlp/coronavirus--covid-19--and-blood-donation.html>

blood. These mitigation measures will help ensure blood recipient safety, as well as staff and donor safety in reducing contact with those who may potentially have COVID-19.

IX. Required Temperature Screening Measures for Staff/Volunteers at Home:

- Take your own temperature each day at home before reporting to work.
- Do not come to work if you have a temperature higher than 99.5°F.
- Notify your supervisor or volunteer engagement representative, and HR representative. Refer to the Employee and Volunteer Guidelines for Coronavirus Health Concerns on The Exchange at https://intranet.redcross.org/content/dam/redcross/documents/staff_services/hr_policy/coronavirusstaff-guidelines.pdf

X. Required Temperature Screening Measures for Staff/Volunteers at the Drive:

An added verification of the health of our staff and volunteers is required to protect our coworkers, team, and donors. Each person's temperature must be taken when they arrive at work (at the drive or fixed site). It is the responsibility of the team lead/supervisor to ensure that all staff have their temperature taken with the infrared thermometer after arriving at the site and prior to setting up the site.

- If you have a temperature higher than 99.5°F, you will be asked to leave the drive and return home.
- If you become sick while at work, immediately isolate yourself and notify your supervisor who will follow the protocol for notification.
- Go home as soon as possible.
- Seek medical advice if you develop the symptoms of COVID-19, such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath.

XI. Mandatory Social Distancing

Social distancing is a mitigation measure that can slow and reduce viral transmission and the effects on individuals. In general, social distancing means maintaining at least a 6-foot separation from others. People who are in close proximity of an infected person have the greatest risk of infection, and people are most contagious when they are ill. In the interest of the public health of our donors, staff, and volunteers, no guests will be permitted to enter drives or donor rooms (no children, babies, or teens unless the teen is donating).

- A 6-foot separation of donors is mandatory at all times. You must physically separate donors to prevent donors from congregating in one area and prevent back-up in lines such as in waiting and refreshment areas. Ensure that seating in the waiting queues, for example, temperature prescreening, waiting/lobby area, registration, health history, phlebotomy, and the refreshment/hospitality area, etc., is spaced 6 feet apart and prevents physical contact between donors.

- 6-foot social distancing must also be used on self-contained units (SCUs). SCU usage will be evaluated by local leadership for adjustments since each SCU may present unique challenges.
- Separate waiting donors by 6 feet and provide visual cues on the floor (for example, use the black and yellow (tunnel tape), dots, sticky notes to indicate where donors should stand).
- Refreshment areas must have chairs 6 feet apart and only serve individually wrapped/single-serve items.
- Any measuring device can be used to measure to 6 feet, such as a tape measure or phone app for measuring, or use other known lengths, such as height/foot size.
- Methods of separation include, but are not limited to:
 - Longer/more tables and fewer donors
 - Donor beds that are positioned foot to foot, or two bed units
- 6-foot social distancing also applies to all staff and volunteers as well as donors. Do not congregate in areas for lunch or breaks. Best practice: No sharing of food—single serve food only

XII. **Travel and Deferral Information**

Red Cross has implemented new blood donation deferrals out of an abundance of caution. Red Cross is now asking 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 the virus, or is suspected to have it.

As the situation evolves, Red Cross will continue to evaluate all emerging risks in collaboration with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and industry partners to determine if additional intervention strategies are needed.

XIII. **Resources**

- CDC What to do if you are sick - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-aresick/index.html>
- CDC When and How to Wash Your Hands - <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-howhandwashing.html>
- CDC People At-risk for Serious Illness from COVID-19 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html#stayhome>
- CDC Print Resources - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019ncov/communication/factsheets.html>