

U.S. runs short on blood due to pandemic



Blood banks in the United States are reportedly running short of supplies as the COVID-19 pandemic reduces donations and disrupts their staffing.?

Washington, December 28 (RHC)-- Blood banks in the United States are reportedly running short of supplies as the COVID-19 pandemic reduces donations and disrupts their staffing.

“This is the biggest challenge that I’ve seen in my 30 years in the business,” American Red Cross executive Chris Hrouda told the New York Times. He added that the Red Cross, which accounts for about 40% of US blood supplies, is struggling to keep even one day’s worth of demand in inventory – a far cry

from the three-day cushion that's normally maintained.

Part of the problem is that because of social-distancing restrictions and remote work, many businesses and colleges have canceled their usual blood drives. And like many employers, the Red Cross is struggling to maintain adequate staffing. Moreover, a December 10 tornado outbreak that left hundreds of people injured across parts of the central U.S., including Kentucky, stretched the already thin inventories.

Some hospitals have reportedly been forced to hold blood drives of their own and keep a tighter lid on their supplies. Dr. Jennifer Andrews, medical director at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, told the Times that her hospital has recalibrated transfusions with fewer red blood cells to help preserve inventories.

Blood supplies have to be constantly refreshed because blood components have a short shelf life. It also takes several days to test and process new donations. If supplies fall short of demand – blood is needed for surgeries and various medical procedures, including some cancer treatments – patients must be prioritized according to the most critical needs.

The Red Cross website features a red banner at the top warning that the charity is suffering its worst blood shortage in more than a decade. “The dangerously low blood-supply levels have forced some hospitals to defer patients from major surgery, including organ transplants,” the Red Cross said.

Surging gun violence in America's big cities is exacerbating the blood shortage. As Philadelphia media outlet PhillyVoice noted, many shooting victims need blood to survive. Philadelphia blew past its full-year homicide record in November. A local church has a blood drive organized for January 8 to help meet the local supply need, but PhillyVoice said that as of Friday, only six people had registered, and 30 commitments were needed to keep the event from being canceled.

Southern California journalist Joelle Zarcone, who has a rare blood disorder that requires her to get dozens of transfusions each year, wrote last week that for the first time in her life she has to wonder whether supplies will be available when her next appointment comes around. “Having those units of blood waiting for me is no longer a guarantee.”

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