



DO YOU KNOW THESE FIVE FACTS ABOUT BLOOD DONATION?



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On 14 June, we celebrate World Blood Donor Day – an annual event that recognises the individuals involved in the donation of over 100 million units of blood worldwide every year,^{1,2} helping to save the lives of patients who require transfusions for a range of medical reasons. It raises awareness of the altruism and sense of unity involved in blood donation, and the need for safe blood and blood products to be consistently used in healthcare. World Blood Donor Day coincides with commemoration of Karl Landsteiner³ – pioneer of the ABO blood classification system – who was born on 14 June 1868.

In recognition of the event's importance, we mark World Blood Donor Day this year by sharing **five facts about blood donation** that may broaden your perspective on an issue that has global importance.

1. New changes in law for blood donation

A landmark change in blood donation is set to be implemented in summer 2021 that will allow men who are in same-sex relationships to donate blood across the UK.⁴ This will be for the first time since a blanket ban on blood donation was introduced following a rise in HIV and hepatitis B cases in the 1970s and 1980s.⁵ The new policy implementation takes into account recommendations from the FAIR (For the Assessment of Individualised Risk) Steering Group, and brings a new level of inclusivity to blood donation. It will allow individuals who have had one sexual partner and who have been with their sexual partner for more than 3 months to donate, regardless of their gender, the gender of their partner or the type of sex they have.⁴

It also marks the removal of the current 3-month deferral (the time needed to protect the recipients from getting transfusion-transmitted infections)⁶



for all men who have sex with men – a policy that has been identified as discriminatory against the LGBTQ+ community.⁷ The change in the law is a positive step towards greater inclusivity in how we address blood donation, and a move away from inequality embedded in laws from the 1970s and 1980s.

2. You can donate a pint of blood at one time

Making a blood donation uses 470 ml, which roughly equates to 1 pint of blood.⁸ Factors such as the amount of blood you can safely donate are typically managed through national level with effective organisation and integrated blood supply networks.²

After donation, your body will regenerate the blood volume within 48 hours and replace the lost cells and fluids over the following weeks at varying rates.⁹ These losses include red blood cells, white blood cells, platelets and plasma.⁹

3. Voluntary blood donors remain the primary givers

Between 2013 and 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported an increase of 7.8 million blood donations from voluntary unpaid donors.² The WHO note that:

“...voluntary non-remunerated blood donors are the foundation of a safe, sustainable blood supply. Without a system based on voluntary unpaid blood donation, particularly regular voluntary donation, no country can provide sufficient blood for all patients who require transfusion.¹⁰”

While the other options are comprised of family donations and paid donations, the importance of voluntary donation is underlined by the WHO's vision for achieving 100% voluntary non remunerated blood donation in every country of the world.¹⁰

4. Each country requires blood units equal to 1% of its population

For a country to have an adequate and sustainable blood supply, the WHO estimates that a country requires blood units equal to 1% of its population.¹¹ While this figure seems to be manageable, a study published in *The Lancet Haematology* in December 2019 showed that, of 195 countries examined, 119 (61%) did not have sufficient blood supply to meet their need. This problem is a particular challenge in low- and middle-income countries where blood supply is not meeting the demand.¹²

5. One donation can save three lives

In treating patients with medical conditions such as anaemia, blood cancer disorders, and those undergoing surgical procedures, blood donations play a vital role. The measurement of their impact shows that one single donation has the potential to save the lives of three individuals.¹³

Importantly, the beneficiaries are widespread. For example, the WHO report that:

“...in high-income countries, the most frequently transfused patient group is over 60 years of age, which accounts for up to 75% of all transfusions. In low-income countries, up to 54% of transfusions are for children under the age of 5 years.”

The global importance of blood donation remains vital to patient healthcare and, as such, deserves to be spotlighted through events such as World Blood Donor Day, which urge us to ‘give blood and keep the world beating’. At Alpharmaxim, we are proud to champion such messages regarding the importance of blood donation, recognising that the more people who donate, the more lives will be saved every year.

1. World Health Organization (WHO). Announcing World Blood Donor Day 2021. 14 June 2021. <https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2021/06/14/default-calendar/world-blood-donor-day-2021>. Accessed 11 May 2021; 2. World Health Organization (WHO). Blood safety and availability. 10 June 2020. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/blood-safety-and-availability>. Accessed 10 May 2021; 3. India.com. World Blood Donor Day 2020: know all about the day and why it is important. 9 June 2020. <https://www.india.com/festivals-events/world-blood-donor-day-2020-know-all-about-the-day-and-why-it-is-important-4053098/>. Accessed 10 May 2021; 4. GOV.UK. Landmark change to blood donation criteria. 14 December 2020. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-change-to-blood-donation-criteria>. Accessed 10 May 2021; 5. Evans M. Why can't gay men give blood? *Patient*. 1 November 2019. <https://patient.info/news-and-features/why-cant-gay-men-give-blood>. Accessed 11 May 2021; 6. Shrivastava M, Shah N, Navaid S, et al. Blood donor selection and deferral pattern as an important tool for blood safety in a tertiary care hospital. *Asian J Transfus Sci* 2016;10(2):122-126; 7. McIlroy C. Progress towards inclusive blood donation. *Lancet* 2021;397(10274):580; 8. Wright K. World Haemophilia Day: 9 fascinating things you didn't know about blood. *Independent*. 17 April 2021. <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/blood-spiders-mosquitoes-b1833024.html>. Accessed 11 May 2021; 9. Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. Whole blood donations. 2021. <https://www.mskcc.org/about/get-involved/donating-blood/faqs-donating-blood-platelets/whole-blood-donations>. Accessed 11 May 2021; 10. World Health Organization (WHO). Towards 100% Voluntary Blood Donation. A Global Framework for Action. 2010. https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/44359/9789241599696_eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y&ua=1. Accessed 10 May 2021; 11. Sircar S. COVID-19 and the importance of donating blood. *The Wire*. 1 May 2021. <https://science.thewire.in/health/covid-19-and-the-importance-of-donating-blood/>. Accessed 10 May 2021; 12. Roberts N, James S, Delaney M, Fitzmaurice C. The global need and availability of blood products: a modelling study. *Lancet Haematol* 2019;6(12):e606-e615; 13. Hitchings-Hales J. 6 facts that show why it's so important to give blood to the NHS. *Global Citizen*. 10 November 2020. <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/how-to-give-blood-nhs-uk-facts/>. Accessed 10 May 2021

At Alpharmaxim, we have extensive experience in helping speciality healthcare companies across the world communicate with healthcare professionals and patients, particularly in rare diseases.

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