

Frequently Asked Questions – COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus)

Find answers here to commonly asked questions about COVID-19 and the virus that causes it (novel coronavirus, now called SARS-CoV-2) in relation to blood donation and what Vitalant is doing to keep donors, blood drive coordinators, volunteers, staff and patients safe. If you have a question not covered here, please visit our [donor eligibility page](#), call **877-25-VITAL (877-258-4825)** or email us at getinvolved@vitalant.org.

Quite simply, we couldn't fulfill our lifesaving mission without you. We're in this for the long term and we're asking you to do the same. Thank you for stepping up and helping patients in need. We're counting on your goodwill, partnership and willingness to help others now and in the future. Thank you! [Click here to schedule an appointment](#).

GENERAL

[UP-TO-DATE DONOR ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION](#)

Please do not donate blood if you are not feeling well; Vitalant does NOT test for COVID-19.

How do I know whether I'm eligible to give blood? Where can I go to get the latest information?

Only healthy people can give blood. In light of emerging new information about coronavirus, Vitalant is constantly updating our eligibility criteria as new information emerges from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and blood bank industry leaders. Please visit our website for the [latest donation eligibility information](#).

We are sharing up-to-date information about coronavirus and donation eligibility with our donors and the public via our website, various communications (like email, text, phone calls) and social media.

I have an appointment to give blood soon. Should I keep it?

Yes! We ask you to keep your commitment to donate blood as long as you are feeling healthy and meet all other eligibility requirements the day you donate, including those related to coronavirus.

Blood donation is a critical and necessary health care activity, permitted by the [CDC](#), the U.S. Surgeon General and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) even in cities and states where "shelter in place" and restrictions on "essential activities" have been implemented.

Response to coronavirus is rapidly changing on a day-to-day basis. From self-quarantine measures to shelter-in-place orders, daily life has been as heavily impacted as blood donation operations during this time. We know things may continue to change and a strong appointment schedule in the coming weeks and months will enable Vitalant to ensure patient needs are met.

It is vital we keep our blood supply strong. Blood has a short shelf life and must be continually replenished.

I'm trying to schedule an appointment to give blood, but I cannot get through to someone on the phone (or there are no appointments available). Do you really need the blood?

As blood drives have canceled, we are working quickly to open additional donation opportunities (including extra appointment slots, extending donor center hours and offering additional places to donate) in the coming days and weeks. Please don't feel discouraged if there isn't an immediate appointment available—patients still need you. As experts have emphasized, we don't know when the outbreak will end; we'll continue to face blood collection challenges during the coming months.

Appointments are strongly encouraged in the coming days, weeks and months so we can ensure a consistent blood supply. Vitalant needs to collect about 5,000 donations every day of the year to meet the ongoing blood needs of patients. If you cannot find a convenient donation opportunity online, call **877-25-VITAL (877-258-4825)** for assistance.

I'm over 65 years old—should I still donate?

The blood donation process is safe, but it is a personal choice for anyone—including those who are over 65 years old. In areas where government agencies have advised residents to “shelter-in-place,” you can leave your home to donate blood.

My state's health department/governor has instituted a self-quarantine/stay-at-home order where I live. Can I still come donate blood?

Yes. If people can still go to grocery stores and pharmacies, giving blood is okay to do as a critical and necessary health care activity.

If you are healthy and well—and you meet all other eligibility criteria, including for coronavirus—we encourage you to schedule an appointment to donate blood.

PROTECTING DONORS, STAFF, COORDINATORS AND PATIENTS

(Includes Social Distancing)

What is Vitalant doing to protect donors, blood drive coordinators, volunteers and staff?

Vitalant has strict measures in place to ensure only healthy donors are giving blood.

- We are prominently posting signage at each donation location, reminding people they must be well and healthy to donate and must meet all eligibility requirements including those related to coronavirus.
- We are taking all donors' (and visitors') temperatures at check-in; those with temperatures higher than 99.5 are not allowed to donate or stay at the site.

Vitalant is following social distancing recommendations to keep donors and staff safe.

- We're providing adequate spacing of chairs in the waiting, donation and refreshment areas to ensure a 6-foot distance between donors.
- We're offering donors the opportunity to wait in their cars or other comfortable and convenient locations. If donors share a cell phone number when registering, staff will call or text when ready to begin a donor's medical interview.
- We're setting up larger waiting areas outside of bloodmobiles (or nearby indoor sites, if available), and limiting the number of donors on bloodmobiles, to ensure a 6-foot distance between donors.
- We're asking our volunteers or staff to pass out pre-packaged, single use servings of snacks/beverages.

There is no inherent risk of getting coronavirus from the donation procedure itself. To minimize the risk of contracting it from others, our staff follow rigorous safety and disinfection protocols including:

- Wearing gloves and changing/sanitizing them between donors
- Washing their hands before and after any donor contact, after removing gloves and frequently throughout the day. If soap and water aren't readily available, they use hand sanitizer (with 60% alcohol).
- Wiping down donor-touched and other high-touch areas often and after every collection
- Using sterile, one-time use collection sets for every donation
- Thoroughly cleaning a donor's arm with an antiseptic for 30 seconds
- Using blankets only once and then professionally cleaning them or using disposable blankets. Blankets may also be wrapped in disposable draping and reused. Donors may bring their own blankets. Heating pads are covered with a disposable pillowcase.

- Encouraging donors to wash their hands, or use hand sanitizer, before visiting our refreshment area.
- Discouraging children and other visitors from coming to our donation locations.

Can people get coronavirus from a blood transfusion?

COVID-19 continues to pose no known risk to patients receiving blood transfusions. There are no reported cases of transmission of this virus via blood transfusion. No cases of transfusion-transmission were ever reported for the other two coronaviruses that emerged during the past two decades (SARS and MERS-CoV).

If I give blood, will it weaken my immune system to fight off coronavirus?

Blood donation does not impact or weaken a donor's immune system.

Should I donate blood to get tested for coronavirus?

No. There currently is no test available for blood donations that screens for COVID-19 and the virus that causes it.

If you are not feeling well, please do not donate; Vitalant does NOT test for COVID-19.

What should I do if I feel fine when I donate blood but then start feeling sick later?

Please contact us immediately at the phone number listed on your post-donation instructions.

How can I protect myself from getting coronavirus?

There is currently no vaccine for coronavirus (COVID-19), but to reduce the risk of infection, the CDC recommends:

- Washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- Avoiding touching the eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands
- Cleaning high-touch objects and surfaces
- Staying home if feeling sick

If you can be asymptomatic and contagious, how do you know your staff are healthy? Do you test your staff for coronavirus? Do you take the temperature of your staff members to see if they're sick? Are you enforcing self-quarantine for your staff?

There is currently no reliable, timely test available to identify the very small number of healthy individuals who are asymptotically infected and contagious. Our staff follow rigorous protocols to lower the risk of transmission at donation sites.

Our staff are required to stay home if feeling sick and must self-quarantine for 14 days if exposed to an individual who is lab-diagnosed with COVID-19. Our staff notify their supervisors if they have symptoms or have a fever. Vitalant has developed guidance for staff to monitor their own temperatures.

Do your staff members wear masks?

Masks are not recommended at this time for our donor care staff. Masks are important for critical care and acute care staff who work with sick people at hospitals and long-term care facilities. Masks are not recommended for blood collection staff who work with people who are well and healthy. Some staff members, however, who are immunocompromised, may be wearing masks as the nature of their work requires interacting with many people every day; including staff (and volunteers) handling temperature screening.

With all the talk about coronavirus, are you canceling blood drives?

It's critical that healthy donors continue to give blood—and organizations continue to organize and host blood drives—to maintain a strong blood supply for patients. Some organizations have canceled blood drives as their schools or

worksites have closed or gone remote. However, blood drives account for about 60% of the blood Vitalant collects. We are asking organizations to continue hosting blood drives whenever possible, and other organizations to host a blood drive to replace canceled drives.

I live with a (doctor, nurse, health professional). Can I donate? Can they?

If you have lived with or been in close contact with individuals diagnosed with or suspected of having COVID-19 infection, you should not donate. A health care worker who uses personal protection equipment and comes in contact with diagnosed or suspected individuals should not donate themselves; but, as long as they are asymptomatic, they do not affect the donation eligibility of those with whom they live.

Can someone who has had coronavirus donate blood once they have recovered?

Vitalant requires that people with diagnosed COVID-19 infection wait at least 28 days after *resolution* of their symptoms before donating blood, based on FDA guidelines.

Not only can people with resolved COVID-19 infection resume donating, we believe they *should* donate for two reasons:

- First, their plasma may contain antibodies that could be given to people battling life-threatening infections if the donor self-identifies as someone who had test-confirmed COVID-19.
- Second, since individuals with resolved infections are not likely to become re-infected for a significant period of time, they will be able to sustain the blood supply while others are deferred from donating.

Is Vitalant involved in any COVID-19 research?

[Vitalant Research Institute](#) is on the front lines, researching the role of convalescent plasma—that is, plasma taken from COVID-19 patients who have fully recovered—in treating newly diagnosed patients.

Vitalant Research Institute was instrumental in the development of Zika virus blood testing and continues to be highly engaged in research, including coronavirus, that impacts the blood supply, including donor health and transfusion safety.