

Donating Blood



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HEALTH

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World Blood Donor Day takes place on **14 June** each year. The aim is to raise global awareness of the need for safe blood and blood products for transfusion and of the critical contribution voluntary, unpaid blood donors make to national health systems.

Getting involved

Most of us are squeamish when it comes to needles and blood and wouldn't even consider donating, but here's something to think about before saying "no thanks". The South African National Blood Service (SANBS) needs to maintain a bloodstock level for 5 days for each blood group to ensure sustained blood availability for patients in need. However, less than 1% of South Africans are active blood donors. You could actually save lives by getting involved!

One unit of blood, which is approximately 480 ml can save a minimum of three lives. Yes, three lives! Every unit of blood is separated into red blood cells, plasma and platelets and are the transfusable components necessary to save lives.

The following are of the many that can be saved through transfusion:

- Cancer or leukaemia patients
- Children with severe anaemia
- Accident victims and patients undergoing surgical operations
- Women who experienced complication due to pregnancy (to treat haemorrhaging)

There are many donor centres across South Africa and all you need to do is to walk into one near you and become someone's hero. As a bonus, the SANBS hands out very nifty gifts to donors as a small thank you for your contribution to saving lives.



Keeping everybody safe!

However, not everyone can donate blood. The SANBS welcomes everyone but also ensures proper safety and screening procedures are in place. Once you decide to donate blood, you will find that you need to complete a comprehensive health questionnaire to help the SANBS with their screening process. They will also test your iron levels and blood pressure to ensure that you are healthy enough to go through with the procedure.

If you are donating for the first time, your red blood cells won't get used. Your plasma gets quarantined until your next donation. If the tests come back negative after your second donation, the quarantined plasma from your first donation will be used.

Blood has to test negative for sexually transmittable diseases for all the components to be used and is only safe once the tests for HIV, Hepatitis B & C and Syphilis show that it is clear. SANBS conducts Nucleic acid Amplification Technology (NAT) tests on every unit of blood that is donated. However, there is still the danger during the window period that the disease cells cannot be detected. So, if your lifestyle puts you at any risk of contracting an infection that can be transmitted through blood, you should rather not consider becoming a donor.

Putting the shoe on the other foot and to get ease of mind, it is very important to know that you cannot contract AIDS by donating blood. Every needle and apparatus used is sterile, sealed and used only once. Strict protocols are followed and the used needles and lancets are thrown into a special medical-waste container and incinerated. It is therefore really safe to donate!



Not all heroes have capes!

If you are between the ages of 16 and 75, weigh more than 50kg and lead a sexually safe lifestyle, you can visit a clinic and register as a blood donor. But, if you are really afraid of needles, you can support the SANBS with their planned, sustainable blood drives that can be hosted at companies, organisations and institutions helping them to achieve their average of 3000 units of blood every day (nationally) to reach their target and save thousands of lives.

There are certain things to keep in mind when you consider hosting a blood drive, but once you've dealt with the basic criteria, you are on your way to become a hero! Alternatively, if you become a donor or convince others to become donors, you can also do your bit to save lives!



HEALTH BENEFITS of donating blood include good health and **REDUCED RISK** of cancer and hemochromatosis. It helps in reducing the risk of damage to liver and pancreas. Donating blood may help in **IMPROVING** cardiovascular health and reducing obesity.

Source:
www.SANBS.org.za

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