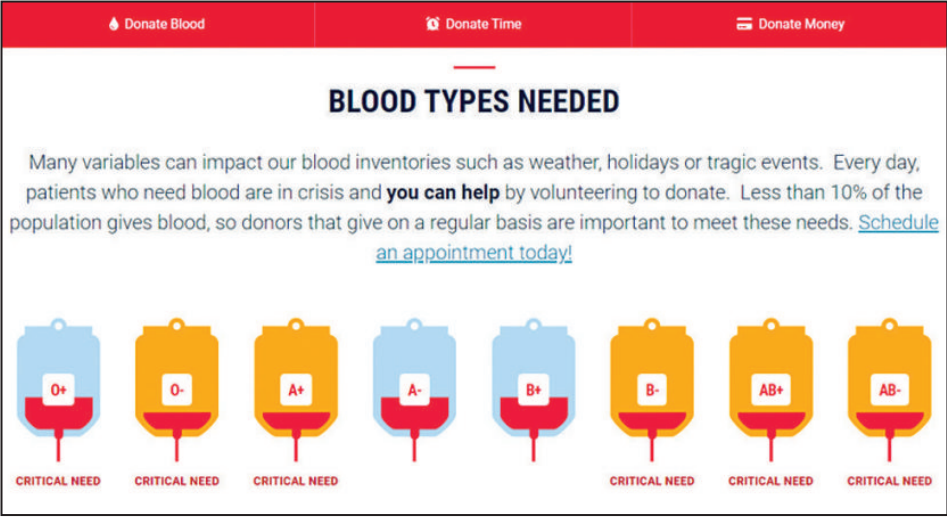


BLOOD

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Behind the scenes, Mississippi Valley Regional Blood Center laboratory personnel take units of blood collected at drives and produce red blood cells, plasma and platelets. A machine takes the blood and “spins it down” into the components that have multiple uses.

Watts said the process “is really like an assembly line” and personnel need 10 weeks of training.

Tubes of blood collected at the same time as whole units are also sent to the lab, where they are tested for a variety of diseases, such as hepatitis, HIV and Zika.

Blood drives generally take place during the day, and the test lab runs operations overnight

“A lot of our tubes come in between 4 p.m. and 4 a.m.,” Watts said. “We process about 600 to 800 of these tubes every day. Once the tests come back that they’re clear, we can start releasing these products back to our distribu-

“With people staying at home, and business employees working remotely, that’s certainly taking a toll on our blood drive operations.”

- Jim Watts, manager of donor and government relations

tion centers, where they can be stored and ready to go to our hospitals.”

He added: “It takes us about 24 to 48 hours from the time we get products in the door to the time they are ready to be released.”

Products are stored at one of seven regional hubs. Red blood cells can be stored for 42 days, platelets for five days and frozen plasma up to one year. The closest such hub to Metro East is in Earth City, Mo.

Most of the products are sent out long before the storage period ends.

Hospitals have a bank of blood at each of their facilities to handle any trauma cases or related needs. Those institutions use an ordering system and get blood products from Mississippi Valley on a routine basis or an emergency basis.

Mississippi Valley’s distribution centers are staffed around the clock.

Certain blood components, like O negative and A positive blood, and A/B plasma are in high demand. That demand is even higher in times of crises, like during the recent Texas storms, but the supply is so iffy that sharing

supply outside of Mississippi Valley’s normal area becomes a challenge.

“We have to conserve everything for our local hospitals,” Hess said.

Not-for-profit blood centers across country are in the same situation, they said.

“We meet daily to forecast what we think we’re going to be able to collect, compared to what we think the hospitals are going to use. And we look pretty far out. We forecast for the year, but there’s a lot of uncertainty when you get past three months.”

Right now, collections are expected to remain around 3,200 red blood cell units a week through mid-May.

“June is going to be a telling time, because it could go either way,” she said.

To reach Mississippi Valley Regional Blood Centers, call (800) 747-5401 or visit Bloodcenter.org to find locations.



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