

Mayo Clinic Q&A - Dr. Justin Juskewitch - Blood Donation Mon...

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SPEAKERS

Dr. Halena Gazelka, Dr. Justin Juskewitch, Narrator

Dr. Justin Juskewitch 00:01

Coming up on Mayo Clinic Q&A, The COVID-19 pandemic has really had an adverse effect on us recruiting and collecting blood donors in general. As a general rule of thumb now in this phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, it's pretty rest assured that we will need your blood type regardless of what it is.

Narrator 00:21


Blood donations typically drop off during and immediately after the winter holidays, which makes national blood donor month in January a critical time for donations.


Dr. Justin Juskewitch 00:31


If you want to make an impact that truly helps save someone's life that meets them alongside some of the challenges of their medical care, the way that anyone can do it is to come in and donate blood. And if you are eligible, that unit, especially right now with as much need as there is, will have a profound impact on a patient's health and care on the other side.


Dr. Halena Gazelka 00:56


Welcome, everyone to Mayo Clinic Q&A. I'm your host, Dr. Halena Gazelka. Blood donations typically drop off around the holidays, making national blood donor month of January an important time to share the message about saving lives by giving blood. Here to discuss the importance of blood donation is Dr. Justin Juskewitch, associate medical director of the Mayo Clinic blood donor services. Welcome to the program, Justin.

 Dr. Justin Juskewitch 01:22
Nice to meet you and nice to be here.


 Dr. Halena Gazelka 01:24
Well, I think this is a great topic, because I don't think we talk about this often enough, the importance of blood donation. And so, I'm excited you can tell our listeners about this today. How has COVID affected blood donations?

 Dr. Justin Juskewitch 01:36
That's a good question. So, for many places when COVID first hit the headlines we saw this huge upsurge in blood donors coming in to donate. But to be honest, since like the very first days of COVID, the COVID-19 pandemic has really had an adverse effect on us recruiting and collecting blood donors in general. And it really is a couple of things. First of all when everything shut down and there was social distancing and limiting of people being able to go out and about in the communities, that obviously led to a decrease in donors coming into fixed sites, like we have here at Mayo, and like a lot of the major blood collectors have across the nation. The other long-term thing we saw though, in terms of donors coming in the door was that many blood collection agencies depend on mobile blood drives, a lot of those are at schools like high schools, and places of work. For the high schools, with all of these surges of COVID in the local area, there has been a restriction in the people that are able to come into high schools because it's feared to create a higher risk of having a COVID outbreak there. And then at workplaces before the COVID pandemic, a lot of people worked on site at various work locations. So, you could set up a blood drive at this given worksite. And all of the workers there could come and donate. Now, many businesses have turned to remote working. And so, instead of all those workers being in one place, they're now distributed across their homes. And so, that's really had a hit on having successful mobile blood drives at various work locations across the nation. So, there's been a lot of headwinds, we've had to rely more on the few mobiles that we can have when opportunities arise, and really depend on donors coming to us at fixed sites for blood collection across the United States. So, that has been quite the headwind.


 Dr. Halena Gazelka 02:45
It's really interesting Justin, because COVID has really literally affected almost all aspects of life. And blood donation was not one that I thought of, but that's really interesting. Can people who have had COVID donate blood?

 Dr. Justin Juskewitch 03:52
Yes, not immediately at the time of having COVID, but the FDA has indicated to all the blood collection agencies in the nation that as long as a person is two weeks out from symptoms of COVID, they are allowed to donate blood of any blood product type. And then for a particular subset of individuals who have recovered from COVID-19, some institutions are still collecting


that COVID-19 convalescent plasma, the yellow component of blood from people who have recovered from COVID. It's used as one tool in treating hospitalized patients with COVID. But the rule from the FDA is two weeks and two weeks from your last symptoms.

 Dr. Halena Gazelka 04:35


Good to know. In general, who is eligible to donate blood?

 Dr. Justin Juskewitch 04:39

So, it varies a little bit from state to state in terms of age, but generally speaking, state laws varying, those who are 16 years and older and meet a minimum weight of 110 pounds can come in and donate blood. Some states it is 17, some states it is 16. But certainly all adults as long as they meet the 110 pounds and their vital signs are within the normal range, they are eligible to come in and donate. Some specialized collection types have different weight and height requirements. So, the age will vary.

 Dr. Halena Gazelka 05:16


Are there some individuals whose blood you cannot use because they're on certain medications or have different medical diseases?

 Dr. Justin Juskewitch 05:26

That it's an excellent question. And yes, there is. The FDA, the Food and Drug Administration, has laid out a set of medications that make people ineligible, and you have to be off those medications for a prescribed length of time before you can donate. So, some of the more common ones, isotretinoin which is Accutane for acne treatments, certain blood thinners because we will be collecting through a needle, and we'll use the yellow part of the blood to help replace some of those clotting factors. So, things like warfarin, rivaroxaban, edoxaban, apixaban, those things have a different criteria. Aspirin, if we're collecting platelets, have a deferral criteria. And then there's kind of a smattering of other medications that could be a risk either to the donor cells because we're collecting through a needle through the arm or to the recipient who's receiving them. But every blood collection agency will have when you come in that list of deferral medications. And as part of the questionnaire that's completed, required by the FDA, they specifically ask about whether you have been on those medications or not.

 Dr. Halena Gazelka 06:36

How would I know if you needed my type of blood?

 Dr. Justin Juskewitch 06:39

So, most blood collection agencies at this point, since the start of 2021, the answer is pretty

much we need all blood types. But many blood collection agencies either have websites or social media posts that will indicate what the most acute need is. So, getting plugged in, whether it's through Facebook and following them as a friend or through Twitter or through Instagram, or through their website and looking and seeing what their blood needs are is the best way. I could talk specifically about some of the avenue. We have Mayo Clinic Blood Donor Center, we use websites and various social media postings. But that usually is the best way. As the general rule of thumb now, in this phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, it's pretty rest assured that we will need your blood type regardless of what it is.

D

Dr. Halena Gazelka 07:30

I have a few friends and colleagues who are universal donors or have a more commonly needed type of blood, and they often get contacted to see if they would come in and donate. How often can an individual donate blood?

D

Dr. Justin Juskewitch 07:45

It depends on what you're donating. So, a standard whole blood collection is eight weeks in most parts of the nation, some places it's 12 weeks. If you are donating platelets, then that's usually about a week between donations and no more than 24 donations in a rolling 12 month period. If you're donating plasma, so just the yellow protein components of blood, it's usually 28 days between donations. And then some institutions are able to collect two red cell units at the same time using a technique called apheresis, and in most of those you are required to wait 16 to 24 weeks, depending on the blood collection center before you can donate again. So, it really depends on the type of unit you're giving.

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Dr. Halena Gazelka 08:34

I imagine that there are individuals who have concerns about whether donating blood might affect their own health, whether there are diseases they could contract by donating blood or whether it would affect them adversely. Can you address that, Justin?

D


Dr. Justin Juskewitch 08:47

Yeah, absolutely. So, the risks of blood donation, so there are a few risks associated at the time of donation. And then there's one longer standing risk they'll talk about. But in terms of infectious diseases, the risk is zero as far as you being a blood donor and donating. At the time of donation when we're placing the needle in the vein, there is a small chance that you will end up with a small bruise at the site like you would for any placement of an IV or a small blood collection called a hematoma. There is a lesser chance because we tend to place the needle in the elbow, on the other side of the elbow, where those veins tend to be. There are a couple of small nerves that run through there. And so, it is less than 1% chance that they can have some minor nerve damage that will heal over the course of weeks. So, a little paresthesia or tingling. So, those are the things at the time of the donation. As far as longer term, those individuals who donate products that have a lot of red cells, that whole blood donation I talked about, or that double red donation by that special technique, one of the long-term effects can be iron

deficiency. And so, all blood collection agencies have policies and procedures in place to help safeguard blood donors from acquiring iron deficiency over time. Some places will spread out the time for donations to help the body recover and accumulate that needed iron from the diet. Other places will provide information as to iron supplementation options available or foods that are rich in iron to help replenish that, and specific instructions on how to take those in alignment with what your local primary care provider would suggest. So, the big thing that we are most concerned about long-term is the iron deficiency, but there are ways of modifying diet or taking supplements to help with that, and your local primary care physician, if you become a regular blood donor, can help you navigate what's the best option for you. At the time of donations, we test the amount of hemoglobin before someone can donate.

 Dr. Halena Gazelka 11:08


I was gonna ask you that.

 Dr. Justin Juskewitch 11:08

So, for women, you have to have a hemoglobin level of 12.5, men 13.0. And the number one reason that we see across all comers if their hemoglobin is low is because they don't have enough iron. And so, then we recommend those individuals to boost the iron in their diets or take iron pills for a short period of time, and usually those hemoglobin levels come back up.

 Dr. Halena Gazelka 11:31


I'm going to guess we have many listeners who have never donated blood before and don't really know how to get started. What should they do if they're interested?

 Dr. Justin Juskewitch 11:39


Find your local place, read the online materials if they provide some online, and show up to be perfectly honest. I will say one of the best strategies at least for me when I became a first time blood donor, and I've heard from a lot of the donors we have walk into our local donor center, is bring a friend who has done it before. They can tell you about the experiences. But quite honestly, it's really nice just having someone alongside you during the donation process, if that's possible. Some places have social distancing and have to stagger their appointments now in the COVID-19 pandemic. But, I say bringing a buddy is actually one of the best ways you can go through it. They can't be with you as you fill out the questionnaire and do the exam, you know doing the blood pressure and the heart rate and finishing answering the questionnaire, but oftentimes you can be near each other during the donation. And that's how I got through my first full blood donation. I used to be terrified of getting blood drawn, and I'm in a transfusion doc. I used to be terrified of having my blood drawn just for routine clinical testing, and I feel a little woozy. Having that friend who had donated before just come alongside and just hang out while we were doing that was a game changer for me. And it's been a game changer for a lot of people. But use Google or use your local search engine, figure out where the local blood collection agencies are, look at their website, and give them a call. And they will literally walk you through the whole rest of the process.

 Dr. Halena Gazelka 13:06


That is a great suggestion taking a friend, I love that. Plus, it's two people giving blood instead of just one.

 Dr. Justin Juskewitch 13:12


Correct.

 Dr. Halena Gazelka 13:12

Anything else you would say to those who are on the fence about blood donation?

 Dr. Justin Juskewitch 13:16

I would say this, that I'm one of the more junior attending physicians in our division. We have several senior physicians who have been in practice 20-25 years. We have never seen such a long-term mismatch between the supply of blood coming in and the demand that we're seeing. The demand in the midst of this pandemic has been incredibly high, in part because our population is aging, and as the population ages those individuals are more likely to need blood transfusions for the types of medical care they need. But also some people are still catching up from the care that they had to defer during like the early phase of the pandemic. And as a result when they're coming in their disease is a little more advanced, and their need is a little bit more. So, if you want to make an impact that truly helps save someone's life, that meets them alongside some of the challenges of their medical care, the way that anyone can do it is to come in and donate blood. And if you are eligible, that unit especially right now with as much need as there is will have a profound impact on a patient's health and care on the other side. So, we have been imploring everyone who has been on the fence. This is the time we need you most, and it doesn't matter where in the country you donate. With all of the large blood providers that unit will find a home to someone who needs it even if they're further away from where you are. Most places try to keep it local, but when there are acute needs or a blood product hasn't been used locally there is a whole network to ensure that that blood product will find a needy patient and help meet them at that critical point in their medical care.

 Dr. Halena Gazelka 15:03

That's wonderful to know because people don't want to think that their blood has been wasted.

 Dr. Justin Juskewitch 15:07

Absolutely.



D Dr. Halena Gazelka 15:07

I always think too Justin, that you never know when it might be your friend, or your family member, or you yourself might who need a blood transfusion or donation from someone else.

D Dr. Justin Juskewitch 15:18

Absolutely. The inventory of today was the donations of yesterday. So, when you reach that time of need, or we have a huge disaster that happens and stuff, it's all those blood donors that came in the days before that are supporting that. So, paying it forward is also a really great way of helping take care of others. And then those others will be there for you when you meet your time of need.

D Dr. Halena Gazelka 15:46

What a great way to start the new year.

D Dr. Justin Juskewitch 15:48

Absolutely.

D Dr. Halena Gazelka 15:50

Thanks for being here today, Justin.

D Dr. Justin Juskewitch 15:52

Thank you so much for having us. And please, if you're eligible, go and donate blood.

D Dr. Halena Gazelka 15:58

Our thanks to Dr. Justin Juskewitch, who is a transfusion medicine specialist at Mayo Clinic. He was here to talk to us about blood donation, and we particularly encourage you to donate in light of the fact that January is national blood donor month. I hope that you learned something today. I know that I did. We wish each of you a wonderful day.

N Narrator 16:20

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