

A Moment to Mind Yourself



Benefits of Blood Donation

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Did you know that every two seconds, someone in the U.S. requires a blood transfusion. * Blood transfusions are needed by people injured in accidents, undergoing cancer treatment, and battling blood diseases. However, in January 2024, the American Red Cross announced that it was facing an emergency blood shortage due to the lowest recorded numbers of donors giving blood in the last 20 years. This low donor turnout had led to a 25% drop in donations, creating a critical shortage. Boston Children's Hospital reports this shortage especially impacts children living with blood disorders like sickle cell disease, thalassemia, and aplastic anemia. Children dealing with Kidney failure or fighting cancers like leukemia and anemia always need blood products, especially due to the side effects of chemotherapy and radiation.

"Every time you donate blood, you can save up to three lives," says Dr. Elizabeth Stone, of New York-Presbyterian/Columbia University Irving Medical Center. "There's no substitute for blood, and there are a lot of different patient populations who need blood — sometimes unexpectedly. If we don't have a constant supply from healthy, altruistic donors, unfortunately, our patients may not get the lifesaving blood transfusions that they need."

However, as an Irish Immigrant, many of us were unable to donate blood due to a ban by the FDA established in 1999. The ban stated that individuals who lived or worked in Ireland, France and/or the United Kingdom from 1980–2001, or who received blood transfusions in the U.K., Ireland, or France between 1980 and 2022, could not donate blood. The FDA established this ban out of fear that donors could transmit variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD), commonly referred to as mad cow disease. Thankfully, after extensive research and reassessment, the FDA determined the risk is now negligible. The FDA removed the ban in full in May 2022. That's not all the good news! Donating blood is actually good for you in many ways!

According to Dr. Robert DeSimone, director of transfusion medicine at New York-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center,

"By going to donate blood, you are getting a mini-physical". Before you donate, your vital signs will be checked to make sure you are fit enough for the procedure. This exam might turn up a condition that needs medical attention, such as high blood pressure or a heart arrhythmia like atrial fibrillation. The health screening could also reveal if you have a rare blood type. This information can be useful if you, yourself, ever face surgery or another medical situation in which a transfusion may be required. Plus, you'll have the satisfaction of knowing your donation is particularly needed. Donating regularly has been linked to lower blood pressure and a lower risk for heart attacks. "It definitely helps to reduce cardiovascular risk factors," says Dr. DeSimone. People usually donate because it feels good to help others, and altruism and volunteering have been linked to positive health outcomes, including a lower risk for depression and greater longevity. "Giving blood is a great way to help the most vulnerable people in your community around you," says Dr. Stone. "People who do altruistic things like donating blood feel closer to their communities, and these positive feelings can lead to better health and longer lives."

As you know, the IPC is a Parish without Boundaries and are planning to celebrate the Irish act of giving and generosity by hosting a Blood Drive on November 22nd. If you are interested in learning more, in donating blood or volunteering on the day, please contact us at the IPC 617-265-5300 or e-mail Andrea at events@ipcboston.org.

Check out these resources to learn more:

<https://www.nybc.org/>

<https://healthmatters.nyp.org/the-surprising-benefits-of-donating-blood/>

<https://www.childrenshospital.org/ways-help/donate-blood>

<https://www.fda.gov/regulatory-information/search-fda-guidance-documents/recommendations-reduce-possible-risk-transmission-creutzfeldt-jakob-disease-and-variant-creutzfeldt>

<https://www.aruplab.com/news/01-06-2023/individuals-who-lived-worked-parts-europe-now-eligible-donate-blood>