



The rapid spread of the SARS-COV-2 virus, which is responsible for COVID-19 or coronavirus pandemic has adversely affected blood supplies globally, and Ghana is no exception. The highly contagious respiratory infection which is primarily spread by close contact with infected droplets necessarily warrants limitation of gatherings as part of guidelines on social distancing. This means that mobile blood donations from schools, religious organisations, corporate institutions, media-driven public blood drives, which together account for >50% of Ghana's blood supply in normal times, are no longer available to blood collecting facilities. This threatens an already inadequate blood supply for patients who require blood, especially in emergencies. So far, evidence is lacking on blood transfusion as a means of transmission of the coronavirus.

In the face of ongoing demands for blood and blood components, an urgent response is required by blood services in Ghana to safeguard the supply of critically needed blood particularly for emergencies. However, it is equally critical to ensure that blood service staff and blood donors are protected from contracting the infection from asymptomatic carriers, and do not contribute to horizontal spread in the community.

This document sets out interventions based on current evidence and best practice that are to be adhered to by all health institutions in Ghana that are involved in blood collection and processing, blood banking and blood transfusion as a practical response to the concerns around COVID-19 and the blood transfusion chain.

Pre-Requisites

- Support from Government and the Ministry of Health
- Visible and proactive leadership at national and facility levels
- Adequate numbers of well-informed staff
- Channels and material for public information, education and communication
- Co-ordination of blood collection facilities and hospitals
- Monitoring and supervision

KEY ELEMENTS

- Transition from mass blood donation sessions to walk-in blood collections at static/fixed sites
- Increased public awareness on the continuing need for blood donation, assurances of interventions to prevent coronavirus spread, and active communication on opportunities for blood donation
- Supply, training and use of appropriate personal protective equipment by blood collection staff

General Public Awareness

- Intensify print and electronic adverts on blood donation.
- Emphasise
 - The continuing need for blood donation
 - The measures taken by the blood centre / collection facility to adhere to methods to prevent coronavirus spread
 - Contact phone numbers for further information and to book appointments. Phone numbers should preferably be toll-free and/or support social media messaging.
 - Self-deferral for those who may have been exposed to coronavirus infection or exhibit related symptoms.
- Utilize as many of the following channels:
 - Local radio or TV stations
 - Local and national newspapers
 - Social media platforms e.g. whatsapp, Facebook
 - Blood centre or Facility website
 - Press conferences
 - Posters at public places including hospitals and blood banks
 - Bulk text messaging to blood donors
 - Direct phone calls to individual blood donors and representatives of existing blood donor panels.
 - National Council for Civic Education (NCCE) information vans for announcements and public education

For further information, please contact:

National Blood Service Ghana, Head Office: 0302 663701

National Blood Service Ghana Contact Centre 0277 501010; 0800 501010 (Vodafone only)

SPECIFIC INTERVENTIONS

Donor Recruitment

- Identify appropriate sites to operate fixed/static clinics spread within the catchment area to allow reasonable access by donors, or utilise mobile blood collection vans/trailers.
- Develop and deploy standard message on recruitment that covers the emphasis listed under 'General Public Awareness'.
- Draw up lists of names and contacts of blood donors due for donation and systematically tele-recruit.
- Re-assign blood donor recruiters from field recruitment to tele-recruiting
- The names and contacts of donors who show up to donate should be compiled after each day's session for bulk sending of thank you message not later than 24 hours after the donation.
- All centres are encouraged to survey donors who attend donation clinics on the public communication channel they responded to.
- In the event of lockdown (restrictions on non-essential movements), the National Blood Service will make a case for exemption of persons commuting for the purpose of blood donation, as has been the case in other nations.

Donor Selection

- Use non-contact thermometers to check temperatures of potential blood donors at reception.
- Potential donors must first be assessed for COVID-19 exposure or symptoms by use of special-purpose questionnaire
- Those who pass the initial screening should proceed to complete the regular screening comprising standardised health questionnaire, Hb estimation and vital signs.

Donor Care

- Institute extended hours of opening of blood collection facilities to cater for workers.
- Provide donors with take-away slips bearing a contact number for the Centre to notify donor care staff in the event that they do not feel well after donating.
- Donation beds, squeeze balls should be wiped down with disinfectant after each blood donation. This action should be visible to waiting donors.
- Staff should don surgical masks while attending to donors.
- Blood should be collected in double- and triple-bags as much as possible, instead of single bags.

Blood Centre Staff

- All heads of internal units are to formally interact with their staff to disseminate directives from the Ministry of Health and the National Blood Service on coronavirus prevention, and receive feedback and concerns for action.
- Facilities are encouraged to utilize work-based groups on social media platforms to share information, curb misinformation, and to provide support to staff who need assistance.
- To promote social distancing, all non-essential staff should be asked to proceed on leave, and critical staff remain at post to maintain the service.
- Staff who develop symptoms or come in contact with infected people should contact the supervisors for further action.
- In the event of a lockdown, blood service staff as essential workers should be issued with appropriate documents bearing identifiers to allow movement to work.

Specific Interventions to Prevent Coronavirus Spread

- Provide hand-washing equipment e.g. veronica buckets at entrance of facility, including soap and disposable paper towels.
- Provide alcohol-based sanitizers to be used by donors at facility reception, immediately after donation and after refreshment, before leaving premises.
- Rearrange seating to ensure donors sit at least 1 metre apart in the waiting area.
- Limit visitors to the blood centres or blood banks.

Clinical Services and Haemovigilance

- Clinical facilities served by blood banks and blood centres should be informed of limited blood stocks and strongly encouraged to defer non-emergency surgeries and procedures that may require blood, and to practice patient blood management.
- Blood banks within catchment area should be encouraged to set up a system of communication to respond to emergency requests for blood units from nearby facilities.
- Patients and clinical staff should be provided with material on the risks of COVID-19 with blood transfusion.
- Clinical services must maintain haemovigilance to detect and analyse possible cases of transmission.

Support Services

- Information and communication equipment such as telephones, internet, websites should be kept active.
- Procurement procedures and storekeeping operations should be responsive to urgent needs, while ensuring processes are properly documented.
- Security must be provided for facilities and equipment with the reduction in staff strength.