

Sustaining Blood Supply in the Wake of COVID-19 Pandemic

The National Blood Service (NBS) has cancelled mass blood drives nationwide in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the imposition of restricted movement by persons resident in Greater Accra and Greater Kumasi by his H.E. the President. Mass blood drives by schools, religious organisations, and corporate institutions account for over 50% of Ghana's blood supply. The cancellation of the mass blood drives has therefore resulted in acute shortage of blood and components at the three main Blood Centres in Accra, Kumasi and Tamale.

The continuous need for blood to save and improve the lives of many patients who require blood transfusion as part of their clinical management, however, remains. Blood and components are still needed for patients in cases such as maternal bleeding, severe anaemia in children, aggressive cancers, and kidney patients on dialysis. Indeed, the need for blood is even more critical at such a time of acute shortage due to the sharp drop in voluntary blood donations.

The NBS, in line with its mandate to provide safe and adequate blood for transfusion therapy in both private and public health facilities, has put in place measures to sustain blood supply, especially for emergency cases, to avert a sharp rise in deaths due to unavailability of blood for immediate transfusion. An appointment system has been introduced for voluntary blood donors to donate blood at designated Blood Collection Sites with enhanced safety procedures in Accra and Kumasi. The COVID-19 Inter-Ministerial Coordinating Committee has approved the issuance of Blood Donation Pass by the NBS to facilitate the movement of voluntary blood donors who have scheduled appointments to donate blood at the designated collection sites.

An Aide-Memoire on COVID-19 for Blood Centres, Hospital Blood Banks and Health Facilities has been developed and disseminated. The Aide-memoire emphasises the shift from mass blood drives to walk-in voluntary donations at designated Blood Collection Sites, the use of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and safety supplies to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and transfusion of blood by Clinicians only when it is absolutely necessary.

The NBS has also revised its blood donor screening protocol with an enhanced donor questionnaire as a first line screening tool. Potential blood donors who have travel history or had symptoms of common cold, flu or temperature (fever) over the past 14 days are urged to self-defer.

It is important to assure the public that there is no demonstrable transmission of COVID-19 through blood and components. The risk of transmission is very low and largely theoretical. However, sufficient precautionary measures are in place to contain any potential risk of COVID-19 transmission through transfusion. These measures include deferral of at-risk donors, quarantine of suspected blood and components, laboratory testing, and the use of pathogen reduction technology.

Voluntary blood donors are encouraged to contact the NBS via its Donor Contact Centre for a blood donation appointment to save lives at critical moment of COVID-19 pandemic. The safety of donors from COVID-19 infection during the blood donation process has been adequately provided at the Blood Collection Sites.

By Prince E. Asante
Head of Administration, NBS