

National blood shortage felt regionally

By ALEX WITTWER
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EASTERN OREGON — Blood doesn't last long. Platelets last only five days, according to the American Red Cross, while red blood cells will last up to 42 days. Plasma can last up to one year if frozen. Nor can blood be manufactured; the supply of blood relies entirely on donors rolling up their sleeves.

The American Red Cross, which held a nationwide blood drive in January including several blood donation stations in Eastern Oregon, reports it is facing a blood crisis. The organization's website stated its blood supply is at the lowest levels in more than a decade. The alarm was sounded last month during National Blood Donor month.

"While some types of medical care can wait, others can't," said Dr. Pampee Young, chief medical officer of the Red Cross. "Hospitals are still seeing accident victims, cancer patients, those with blood disorders, like sickle cell disease, and individuals who are seriously ill who all need blood transfusions to live even as omicron cases surge across the country. We're doing everything we can to increase blood donations to ensure every patient can receive medical treatments without delay. We cannot do it without more donors. We need the help of the American people."

Local hospitals react to shortage

The national blood shortage has hit uneven ground in Eastern Oregon, with area hospitals reporting their blood supply falling below critical levels.

Most hospitals are handling it well, given the circumstances, while oth-

ers have begun to feel the effects. Most blood that is donated goes to local hospitals, according to Caitlin Cozad, marking and communications director for Good Shepherd Health Care System, Hermiston.

"Community support of American Red Cross blood drives is essential to return our blood supply to pre-COVID minimum stocking numbers," she said. "We especially need O-negative donors. This is one way you can serve your community and help ensure a stable blood supply for local hospitals."

It is unclear to what degree the pandemic has affected the amount of blood donations. Some areas, such as La Grande and Baker City, have experienced an uptick in donations this year in comparison to other areas in the region. Still, the American Red Cross noted that nationwide blood donations have gone down 10% since the beginning of the pandemic.

"We have experienced critical blood supply issues in the past months. We have had no units of O-negative on the shelf two times and zero O-positive one time," said Ronda Reisdorph, a laboratory manager at Hermiston's Good Shepherd Medical Center. "We have been running with less than minimum thresholds in the past few months and no chance for restocking even with emergent cases."

While the medical center expects to receive an increased supply over the coming weeks to supplement its stockpile due, there's no indication that the national blood shortage will improve in the near future.

The American Red Cross supplies approximately 40% of the nation's blood supply, according to the organization, and some hospitals might receive as little



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Jake Yoste, a phlebotomy technician with the American Red Cross, explains the blood donation process to Elena Nightingale at the community blood drive at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in La Grande on Tuesday, Jan. 25, 2022.

as 25% of their requested blood supplies in the coming weeks. Hospitals normally keep a steady supply of blood for routine procedures but can request more in the event of a mass casualty or injury event.

Since much of the blood that arrives in hospitals comes from the arms of local community members, due to the large turnout for Union County blood drives, some local hospitals have fared better in the national crisis.

Mardi Ford, director of communications at Grande Ronde Hospital, La Grande, credited the work of husband and wife duo Linda and Sheldon Strand, who run La Grande's American Red Cross blood drives, as a key factor in ensuring Grande Ronde Hospital has an adequate blood supply. Ford said the hospital works closely with the American Red Cross and has an internal system that is used to track blood supply levels.

Ford said the hospital has only had a couple of instances in the past few years where blood supplies

what we need to serve our patients," she said. "That's one of the beauties of being small and independent. We have options on how we're able to do things."

Wallowa Memorial Hospital, Enterprise, recently received shipments where the requested blood supply was not provided.

"Fortunately, we work with the Red Cross on a blood rotation to keep us at optimal levels and have held on to a supply of the shorted products," said Brooke Pace, director of communications and public relations. "We do this to ensure that nothing is wasted because of outdated. We can still transfer units to regional hospitals in our area if dating becomes a concern."

Stefanie Davidson, Wallowa Memorial Hospital's lab director, urged residents to donate blood amid

the growing national shortage, even as local supplies remain steady.

"Even though we still have an above critical supply, the national shortage is a concern, and we would like to encourage anyone who can to get out and donate," she said.

Pendleton's CHI St. Anthony Hospital fared better than other hospitals in the region, according to the hospital's president, Harold Geller, who noted the hospital was well stocked.

"There is always a concern, pandemic or not," he said. "We here at St. Anthony have taken steps to be prepared as best as possible."

Even still, the hospital president did not mince words about the national shortage.

"Please donate blood," he said. "Now."

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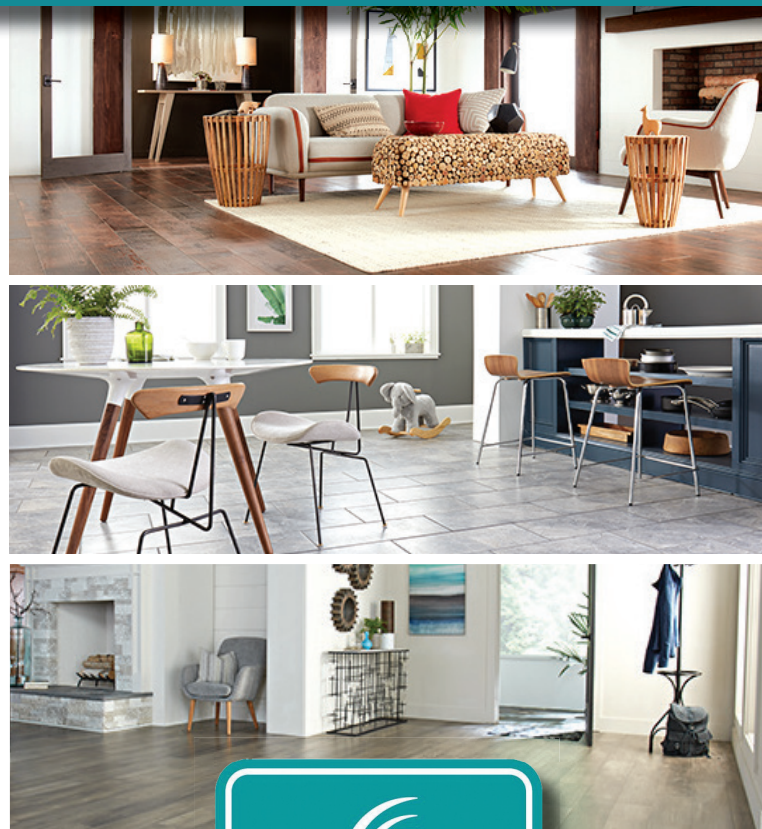
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