

# 'Please donate blood. Now'

National blood shortage felt locally in E. Oregon

By ALEX WITWTER  
EO Media Group

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 others have begun to feel the effects. Most blood that is donated goes to local hospitals, according to Caitlin Cozad, marketing 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 stock-



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

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.

ing 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, there's no indication that the national blood shortage will improve in the near future.

The American Red Cross provides approximately 40% of the

nation's blood supply, according to the organization, and some hospitals might receive as little as 25% of their requested blood shipments 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 reached critical levels.

"We are proactive in making sure that we have 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 out-dating. 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 facility's president, Harold Geller, who noted the hospital was well stocked.

"There is always a concern, pan-

dem 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."

## Changing the rules

The blood crisis also has renewed an effort by lawmakers to change the rules regarding donations by those in the LGBT community.

Senators from across the nation signed a letter on Jan. 14 urging the Food and Drug Administration to change the rules to allow men in same-sex relationships to donate blood. In total, 22 senators signed their names to the letter, including Democratic Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley.

"In light of the nation's urgent blood supply crisis and to ensure that Americans have access to life-saving blood transfusions during the pandemic, we urge you to swiftly update your current blood donor deferral policies in favor of ones that are grounded in science, based on individualized risk factors, and allow all potentially eligible donors to do so free of stigma," the senators wrote Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra and FDA Acting Commissioner Janet Woodcock.

In 1983, at the height of the HIV/AIDS scares of the 1980s, the federal government placed a lifetime ban on gay men donating blood. Those rules were relaxed in 2015 by requiring one year of abstinence, with the time reduced further to three months in 2020.

The letter noted that advances in testing technologies would allow for gay and bisexual men to safely donate blood, and criticized the time-based guidelines that perpetuate stereotypes.

"It is critical that all patients have access to the health care services they need during this pandemic, and for many, the availability of blood and blood products is a necessary component of care," the letter said. "Unfortunately, a significant drop in the number of donations during the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a serious shortage of available blood."

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February 4, 2022



Hello Grant County,

We'd like to welcome new members Frontier Equipment and Frontier Rentals, Umatilla-Morrow Head Start, Inc., and Eastern Oregon Workforce Board.

We would like to give a "shout out" to Humbolt Elementary School for supporting our Greenbacks program and keeping their money local! They buy Greenbacks for awards and incentives for their students and staff. I know our local businesses appreciate that!

Wow! January went by fast. It will be spring before we know it!

We are excited to be hosting the 2022 Cycle Oregon Classic – "Ride the Painted Hills" later this summer. The ride will start and end in John Day and we could have as many as 1,500 riders and all of the support staff here for a couple of days. The ride starts September 10 and ends September 17. Cycle Oregon brings with them several opportunities for local organizations and groups to earn some money by helping with various tasks while they are here. The Chamber will be the Community Coordinator for the two days in John Day. If you are part of an organization and would like to help out, please get in touch with us.

Plans for the Grape and Grain event we have scheduled for Friday, May 13th are coming together! We are looking forward to a wonderful event in the Grant County Fairgrounds Pavilion. We will let you know when tickets are available.

We have ordered our new sign. It will be right out front with a reader board that we will be able to display information for our residents and visitors. We are looking forward to advertising local events and providing other important messages.

If you get the chance, support our local basketball teams that will be playing in the High Desert League 1A District Basketball Tournament at Grant Union High School February 17-19. Let's show the visiting teams and their families some Grant County hospitality! We wish all of our Grant County Teams good luck!

This month's Chamber Business meeting is Thursday, February 17th at 10:30 AM at the Chamber office.

Stay well,  
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Executive Director

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