

World Blood Donor Day 2020

Message from Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia Region



Achieving universal health coverage (UHC) requires all people to have access to sufficient and secure blood and blood products and safe transfusion services. Blood is a vital health care resource used in a broad range of health interventions. It can help patients suffering from life-threatening conditions live longer and with a higher quality of life and supports complex medical and surgical procedures. Blood is essential to treating the wounded during emergencies of all kinds and can have a life-saving role in maternal and neonatal care. But access to blood is still a privilege of the few. Most low- and middle-income countries, including in the WHO South-East Asia Region, struggle to make safe blood available. Globally, 42% of blood is collected in high-income countries, which are home to just 16% of the world's population.

The Region has in recent years made important progress in strengthening the quality and safety of blood services, in line with its quest to achieve UHC, which is one of eight Flagship Priorities. All Member States have developed and are implementing national blood policies, as per the global WHO Strategic Framework for Blood Safety and Availability. Based on data from the Global Database for Blood Safety, the proportion of blood donated in the Region by voluntary, non-remunerated donors is now more than 80%. Significantly, 100% of all donated blood is being screened for transfusion transmitted infections, and almost all Member States have national guidelines for the rational use of blood. All countries are making efforts to increase regular blood donations, which are essential to collecting at least 2 million more units of blood that the Region requires annually.

This year's World Blood Donor Day calls on governments, national health authorities and national blood transfusion services to adequately fund and implement appropriate systems and infrastructure to increase the collection of blood from voluntary, non-remunerated donors. It emphasizes the need for quality donor care, for the appropriate clinical use of blood, and for health systems to provide oversight and surveillance of the whole chain of blood transfusion. WHO is committed to supporting Member States to achieve these outcomes, and to ensuring that access to blood and blood products and services is maintained and strengthened through the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

The emergence and spread of COVID-19 requires blood services to carefully assess existing blood stocks and anticipate future needs. In many countries, the pandemic has led to the cancellation of elective surgeries and non-urgent clinical interventions, and a corresponding reduction in the demand for blood products and services. But blood transfusions are still required in emergency situations, and it is possible that an increase in stocks will be needed to support COVID-19 patients with severe sepsis or requiring extracorporeal membrane oxygenation support. To be ready for all contingencies, and the resumption of elective surgeries and non-urgent clinical interventions, blood services should consolidate and expand supply, for which innovative strategies are key.

Across the Region, public health and social measures that are helping control the spread of COVID-19 have impeded routine blood collection strategies. But there are ways that blood services can continue to collect blood. For example, blood services may consider providing donor transportation or transportation passes. They may intensify efforts to schedule appointments for donations and to reach out to regular donors. And they may reassure potential donors by scaling up infection prevention and control procedures and by strictly observing physical distancing measures. Innovation must continue to define the pandemic response, to which all health services must contribute.

Adequately funded public outreach initiatives are crucial to helping blood services reach new donors and promote regular donations. Blood donation is a life-saving act of solidarity that almost anyone can take part in – a powerful message. Blood donation can be framed as a civic responsibility, and as a key way for health leaders to promote community buy-in to UHC and the grassroots engagement it requires. It is unacceptable for any community, wherever it is located, to lack access to safe blood products and services. With greater awareness comes greater accountability.

On World Blood Donor Day, WHO joins its Member States, partners and civil society to celebrate blood donors, to promote blood donation, and to call for universal access to sufficient and secure blood and blood products and safe transfusion services. WHO will continue to deliver technical support to Member States in the Region to achieve these outcomes, and to maintain and strengthen blood services through the pandemic and beyond. We all have the power to give the greatest gift of all – blood. We must exercise that power often, and for the benefit of all.



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