

Military Blood Program Seeking Type O Donors

The Armed Services Blood Program (ASBP) is looking for a few good donors. Actually, more than a few are needed. Donors with Type O blood are being asked to roll up their sleeves to support ongoing military operations worldwide and to help replenish the military's frozen blood reserves.

Having blood when and where it is needed is key to medical readiness. When you consider that a single battlefield injury victim can require two, 10 or more than 40 units of blood in an emergency and that 75 percent of the blood shipped in support of current operations is Type O, the amount



required to support troops worldwide becomes clear. In addition to providing sufficient quantities of blood, the ASBP must make blood available in remote locations where it is not possible to test for blood type, making Type O the only safe blood to use. This is a daunting task, considering fresh red blood cells must be used within 42 days of collection and it takes 7-10 days after collection before fresh blood can be tested, shipped and available for use overseas and in remote locations.

To address this challenge, the military maintains a supply of frozen red blood cells to use when fresh blood is not immediately available. Since frozen blood can be safely stored for up to 10 years, it bridges the gap and ensures that blood is readily available to meet the military's needs worldwide. Frozen blood must be stored in large freezers and additional equipment is needed to prepare frozen units for transfusion, so it is cannot be used everywhere. However, extending the shelf life of blood from 42 days to ten years in strategic locations enables the ASBP to make frozen blood available until the supply of liquid blood begins to flow.

Strategic use of frozen blood also reduces the amount of fresh blood that expires in areas where blood is needed infrequently. Even though it may not be required often, blood must be available wherever service members are deployed...just in case. Not having blood available when it is needed carries a much greater cost than keeping frozen blood in reserve. By using a combination of fresh and frozen blood, the ASBP maintains the flexibility required to support service members deployed around the world.

Of particular importance in the military's fresh and frozen blood supplies is Type O blood. Type O is very valuable because everyone can use it, which also means it is needed the most. During the push to restock the frozen blood supplies, the ongoing support of Type O donors will be essential as Type O blood makes up the vast majority of frozen blood.

Lt. Col. Ruth Sylvester, Director of the Armed Services Blood Program, recognizes the value of every Type O donor. "Type O donors are the first line of defense for trauma victims. Until a blood type can be verified, Type O blood is used to keep trauma victims alive. Once their blood type is determined, type-specific blood is transfused. But without Type O blood available, many patients would never make it until the test results came back. In areas where we send frozen blood, it makes sense to provide the most flexible type possible so we can help everyone in need."

The ASBP is stepping up its collection efforts to support the frozen blood initiative. Sylvester says, "The blood supply has to be robust at all times. Collecting, processing and shipping blood takes time. In an unpredictable world, time is in short supply. We need to make sure blood is not."

To continue its support of service members, the ASBP needs the support of the service members themselves. Military blood donor centers can only collect blood from personnel on active duty (all services), government employees, retirees and military family members. With many who served in malarial endemic areas during Operation Iraqi Freedom being deferred from donating for one year, regular donations from

those still eligible is critical. Giving blood offers a unique opportunity to save the life of a fellow service member injured in the line of duty or a family member in the community.

Blood donor center (BDC) personnel are always thankful for their donors. As Sylvester puts it, "We know that blood donors save lives every day, and BDC staff members let them know they are appreciated every time they donate. Repeat donors and those who ask that we call them when their blood type is needed are really special. They help ensure we have a consistent supply of all blood types and help us out when an urgent need arises."

If you'd like to donate blood or sponsor a group blood drive, contact your [local blood donor center](#) to make arrangements.

American pride flows through us all. Give blood.

