



Blood and Transplant



National Blood Week: More than 3,500 new blood donors are needed in Somerset to meet demand

- New 5-year Blood Strategy focusses on increasing number and diversity of donors
- Urgent need for more Black African, Black Caribbean and younger donors in Somerset
- Mass public campaign to identify people with most needed blood types
- Sign up at blood.co.uk or on the GiveBloodNHS app

NHS Blood and Transplant are urging people in Somerset to give blood as new targets reveal 3,512 new donors are needed in the county to save lives over the next year.

Nationally one million more blood donors are needed over the next five years to ensure patients receive the right type of blood to save and improve their lives, with a particular need for Black African, Black Caribbean and younger donors.

The five-year Blood Service Strategy, published at the start of National Blood Week, sets ambitious plans to recruit up to a million new donors and double the number of regular donors with the rarest blood types. This will ensure better matched blood types for patients in the future and reduce health inequalities.

Most people know the main blood types — O positive (35 per cent of the population), O negative (13 per cent), A positive (30 per cent), A negative (8 per cent), B positive (8 per cent), B negative (2 per cent), and AB positive (2 per cent). But the public is less familiar with the many sub-types that can provide an even better match to improve their treatment.

There is a particular urgency for more donors of Black African and Black Caribbean ethnicity to treat people with sickle cell. Sickle cell is the fastest growing genetic blood disorder in the UK and mostly affects people of Black heritage. It requires regular transfusions — most often with the specific blood sub type Ro. Most patients are children, and demand for Ro blood is projected to double from 2016/17 — 2025/26. Fifty five percent of Black blood donors have the Ro subtype compared to 2.4% of donors from other ethnicities.

Stephen Cornes, Director of Blood Supply at NHS Blood and Transplant said:

"Currently we can only meet around half of the demand for Ro blood through our existing donor base and demand for this rare blood type is rising. This means many sickle cell patients often receive less well-matched blood which, while clinically suitable, can pose a longer-term risk to patients who receive regular transfusions. We urgently need new Black African and Black Caribbean donors to come forward and donate blood.

"In addition to the rarest blood types, we also need 1 million new donors over the next five years of all blood types. As the NHS treats more patients, we need to grow the total number of donors too.

"We carefully manage stocks to ensure we do not waste any precious blood. If you cannot get an appointment immediately it is because we have enough of your blood type right now. Please book for a later date or respond when we contact you."

Blood donation generally takes up to an hour and you will be doing something amazing. Once donated, blood is taken to NHSBT laboratories where it is divided into:

- **Platelets:** Platelets help to stop bleeding and can be donated directly. Donors with A negative, A positive or AB negative blood <https://platelets.blood.co.uk/who-can-donate-platelets/#blood> are mostly needed. 69 per cent treat people with cancer, 17 per cent helps people after surgery, 8 per cent treat diseases, and 6 per cent help adults and babies in intensive care.
- **Red cells:** two thirds are used to treat a vast range of conditions including sickle cell, anaemia, cancer and blood other disorders. One third is used in surgery and emergencies including childbirth.
- **Plasma:** 17,000 people are treated with medicine made from plasma. Plasma can be used to stop blood loss in trauma patients and is also made into a medicine for people with weak immune systems. People can also donate plasma directly.

NHSBT carefully manages blood stocks to ensure the system is as efficient as possible. Red blood cells have a shelf life of 35 days, although some of the ultra-rare types are stored in NHSBT's frozen blood bank in Liverpool.

Appointments to donate blood are arranged based on a donors' blood type to meet future patient needs. Knowing our type is an essential part of being a next-generation donor.

A mass public campaign is being held this National Blood Week and throughout June to identify people with most needed blood types. Young people and those of Black African or Black Caribbean heritage are being urged by the NHS to find out their blood type, by making their first donation at one of the many events being held at Blood Donor Centres in England.

NHS Blood and Transplant Advocate and star of Channel 4's *A Place in The Sun* Scarlett Douglas knows how important blood is after her brother received 48 units of blood over more than six hours. He suffered a life-threatening stab wound in his chest when he disturbed a burglar.

Scarlette, who has Ro blood herself, said: "Blood donors saved my brother's life but blood will only be there in the future if young people of every heritage sign up as the next generation of donors.

"Finding matching blood for people of black heritage is particularly hard, so more black donors are urgently needed.

"Please make an appointment or get along to a blood type testing event — your blood will be a match for someone who needs it, and you will save lives."

Dr Bola Owolabi, Director — Health Inequalities at NHS England, said:

"A shortage of blood donation from people of a Black heritage often means that some patients don't receive the best blood-type match and are therefore at risk of serious complications.

"Tackling healthcare inequalities is one of the NHS' top priorities and increasing the number of Black African and Black Caribbean blood donors is crucial in improving outcomes for sickle cell patients especially.

"I would urge anyone who is able to give blood to come forward as soon as possible — you are vital in saving the lives of your neighbours, friends and communities who are battling this disease."

Attend a What's Your Blood Type event or register today and book an appointment by visiting www.blood.co.uk, downloading the GiveBloodNHS app or by calling 0300 123 23 23. Or if you are an existing donor and have not donated in a while, please book your next appointment, or keep checking back for future appointments.