# How do you know blood donations are safe?

Every two seconds, someone in the United States (U.S.) needs blood. A single donation can save lives. However, only 3% of eligible Americans give blood each year.

“When you give blood, you’re giving the gift of life,” said Simone Glynn, M.D., chief of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute’s (NHLBI) Blood Epidemiology and Clinical Therapeutics Branch. “You aren’t just helping patients in critical care, but also those dealing with blood disorders.”

For the person doing the giving, you can be assured that you are doing a great thing, Glynn said. But if you’re the person receiving, can you trust that the blood you’re getting is safe?

Glynn said it’s a very important question. For 30 years, NHLBI has funded programs and research aimed at keeping the nation’s blood supply safe. One of these programs is NHLBI’s Recipient Epidemiology and Donor Evaluation Study, or REDS program. The REDS program conducts research to evaluate and improve the safety of the nation’s blood supply and the safety and effectiveness of transfusion therapies in children and adults. REDS is the largest research program of its kind in the U.S. It addresses potential emerging threats to the blood supply and serves as a resource for ongoing transfusion research. Because of programs like REDS, patients can have confidence that the blood they are receiving is safe.

Another major reason the blood supply is safe and trustworthy, Dr. Kamille West-Mitchell of the National Institute of Health Clinical Center Blood Bank noted, “are the donor screening requirements that blood donation sites have in place to ensure the safety of both donors and blood recipients.” On the day a person shows up to give blood, some of the requirements they must meet are to:

* Be in good health - meaning that you feel well and can perform normal activities
* Have a healthy pulse and blood pressure
* Register a normal temperature – not a fever
* Meet their state’s minimum age requirement
* Not have a low hemoglobin level
* Not have HIV, hepatitis, or risk factors for these infections and other blood transmissible infections
* Not have donated blood in the last 56 days

Once the person’s blood leaves the donation site, it is carefully tested and screened for major known transfusion-transmissible agents such as HIV and hepatitis B and C to ensure it is safe, then stored at the right temperature before it is shipped where needed.

“Blood is always in demand because it’s perishable. But the good news is most people can donate blood,” West-Mitchell said. Finding a place to donate is simple, as there are blood donation sites in nearly every community. For more information about blood donation and safety, visit the NHLBI’s Blood Diseases & Disorders Education Program at [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/education/blood/donation](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/education/blood/donation).