Be a sickle cell fighter and help save lives during Sickle Cell Awareness Month

Diverse blood donors urgently needed to help Kentuckians fight back

(Sept. 4, 2020) — During Sickle Cell Awareness Month, the American Red Cross is calling on African American and Hispanic blood donors to help ensure a diverse blood supply that meets transfusion needs of patients battling sickle cell disease. While having sickle cell disease increases the risk for severe illness from COVID-19, a decline in blood donations from ethnic donors poses an additional risk to patients who depend on blood transfusion for survival. That’s why the Red Cross, in partnership with the Sickle Cell Association of Kentuckiana, invites the community to roll up a sleeve at blood drives in honor of sickle cell warriors September 18, in Lexington and Bowling Green.

According to the Centers of Disease Control (CDC), sickle cell disease, the most common inherited blood disorder in the country, affects 745 residents in the state of Kentucky and about 100,000 people in the U.S. Sickle Cell disease causes red blood cells to be hard and crescent-shaped instead of soft and round. As a result, blood has difficulty flowing smoothly and carrying oxygen to the rest of the body, which may lead to severe pain, tissue and organ damage, acute anemia and even strokes.

Blood transfusion has proven to be effective in treating some complications from sickle cell and Nicole Creech of Lexington knows first-hand how critical regular blood transfusions can be. Diagnosed with sickle cell disease at birth and having experienced her first pain crisis at six months old, she depends on a blood transfusion every three to four months. To date, she has received over 60 transfusions.

“Blood saves my life,” said Creech. “I’ve become blood transfusion dependent in the last decade which means my body produces fewer red blood cells and destroys red blood cells faster than usual, causing a lot of fatigue, shortness of breath, fast irregular heartbeat and pain. When I receive a blood transfusion, I can immediately feel the warmth and replenishment of blood to my organs. Blood donors allow me to continue to live my best life and I will never take them for granted.”

Blood given to those who need repeated transfusions for treatment of sickle cell, like Nicole, must be matched very closely. Blood from a donor with the same blood type and similar ethnic background is less likely to be rejected or cause complications when transfused to a patient. However, amid this pandemic, the Red Cross has seen a significant decrease of African American blood donors, creating an urgent need.

“COVID-19 has posed huge risks for us battling sickle cell,” said Creech. “It’s affected the way we think about our exposure when having to go to the hospital to get care during a sickle cell crisis or when keeping clinical appointments to have our labs drawn, and its caused reluctance for blood donors, which can cause shortages for those of us who need blood [transfusions] as maintenance just to live.”
During the pandemic, The Sickle Cell Association of Kentuckiana is assisting sickle cell patients and families by awarding college scholarships, providing health resources, rent and food assistance and bringing awareness to the need for diverse blood donors.

“It’s important to be a donor,” said Rebecca Seavers, president and director of the Sickle Cell Association of Kentuckiana. “My granddaughter gets monthly transfusions and we’ve been scared; wondering is she going to have blood. We know if she doesn’t get her monthly transfusion, she will end up in the hospital three to four days later.”

Help sickle cell patients fight back Sept. 18. With the help of generous blood donors and partners like Shake Rag Barbershop in Bowling Green, St. Peter Claver Catholic Church in Lexington and the Sickle Cell Association of Kentuckiana, the Red Cross can help ensure blood is available for sickle cell patients whenever and wherever it is needed.

**Shake Rag Barbershop Blood Drive Friday, Sept. 18:**
Bowling Green Parks & Recreation, F.O. Moxley Community Center
225 E. 3rd Ave., Bowling Green, KY 42101
11:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.
Sponsor Code: ShakeRag19

**St. Peter Claver Catholic Church Blood Drive Friday, Sept. 18:**
410 Jefferson St.
Lexington, KY 40508
1-6 p.m.
Sponsor Code: Sickle Cell

Each Red Cross blood drive and donation center follows the highest standards of safety and infection control, and additional precautions – including temperature checks, social distancing and face coverings for donors and staff – have been implemented to ensure the health of all those in attendance. Donors are asked to schedule an appointment prior to arriving at the drive and are required to wear a face covering or mask while at the drive, in alignment with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention public guidance.

**How to donate blood**
All blood types are needed to ensure a reliable supply for patients. A blood donor card or driver’s license or two other forms of identification are required at check-in. Individuals who are 17 years of age in most states (16 with parental consent where allowed by state law), weigh at least 110 pounds and are in generally good health may be eligible to donate blood. High school students and other donors 18 years of age and younger also have to meet certain height and weight requirements.

Blood and platelet donors can save time at their next donation by using RapidPass© to complete their pre-donation reading and health history questionnaire online, on the day of their donation, before arriving at the blood drive. To get started, follow the instructions at RedCrossBlood.org/RapidPass or use the Blood Donor App.

**About the American Red Cross**
The American Red Cross shelters, feeds and provides emotional support to victims of disasters; supplies about 40 percent of the nation’s blood; teaches skills that save lives; provides international humanitarian aid; and supports military members and their families. The Red Cross is a not-for-profit organization that depends on volunteers and the generosity of the American public to perform its mission. For more information, please visit redcross.org or cruzrojaamericana.org, or visit us on Twitter at @RedCross.

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