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PUBLIC HEALTH

Sharks used to attract blood donors

Amid looming shortage, Red Cross offers themed shirts, gift cards, chance for a trip

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The American Red Cross hopes sharks and a movie will help boost blood donations so it can avoid a looming blood shortage.

The organization said it has collected 50,000 fewer blood donations than needed over the past few months, and while it says there isn't a blood shortage, more donations are needed to avoid getting to that point.

"The Red Cross is seeing a concerning trend where blood donations are being sent to hospitals faster than they're coming in," said Nicole Roschella, communications manager for the Red Cross of Greater Pennsylvania.

Roschella said the Red Cross is mostly in need of type O-negative, type B-negative and platelet donors.

To encourage donations,
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BLAINE SHAHAN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Bella Espinal, American Red Cross phlebotomist, right, prepares Amanda Sponsler, of Mount Joy, for donating blood Friday during an American Red Cross blood drive at Park City Center. The organization said it has collected 50,000 fewer blood donations than needed over the past few months.

WHERE TO DONATE

People ages 17 and older — 16 with parental consent — can donate blood. Following is contact information to schedule an appointment to donate blood to the Central Pennsylvania Blood Bank, Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health Blood Donor Center, and the Red Cross. Check eligibility requirements at individual blood banks:

● **Blood Bank:**
717giveblood.org or call 800-771-0059

● **Blood Donor Center:**
lghblooddonors.org/donorportal or call 717-544-0170 and choose option 1.

● **Red Cross:**
redcrossblood.org or call 800-733-2767

● **Note:** Go to bit.ly/JulyBloodDrives for a list of July blood drives in Lancaster County.

Blood drive: Red Cross gets creative with sharks in seeking donations

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the organization announced it is partnering with Warner Bros. Discovery for the 35th anniversary of Shark Week and the theatrical release of "Meg 2: The Trench."

Donors who give blood by Sunday will receive a \$15 gift card by email to a merchant of their choice. Additionally, those who give blood by Aug. 12 will be automatically entered to win a three-day trip to New York for two that includes a private shark dive adventure at the Long Island Aquarium. Donors who give blood Monday through July 31 also will receive an officially licensed Shark Week T-shirt, while supplies last.

Roschella wrote the Red Cross has a policy against disclosing which hospitals it gives blood to, but she did say the organization has given more than 1,000 units of red blood cells, more than 240 units of platelets, and more than 60 units of plasma to hospitals in Lancaster County in the past 12 months.

The Central Pennsylvania Blood Bank is the primary blood bank for central Pennsylvania. It provides 100% of the blood for UPMC Lititz and WellSpan Ephrata Community Hospital, as well as 25% of the blood for Penn State Health Lancaster Medical Center, blood bank community relations director Jay Wimer wrote in an email, adding it also supplies blood to Lancaster General Hospital.

Dr. Sarah Nassau, medical director of the Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health Blood Donor Center, said the health system typically uses 600 to 700 units of blood a month. She said LGH gets 70% to 80% of its blood from its own blood drives and the rest from outside blood banks such as the Red Cross and the Central Pennsylvania Blood Bank.

Summer slump

Nassau said how large organizations such as the Red Cross are doing shows the

trend for blood donations overall. She said the blood center is also experiencing a typical summer slump in blood donations at its own drives.

Wimer said in an email that blood donations typically decline in the summer, with many people away on vacations. At the same time, need for blood typically increases in the summer months, with summer activities leading to an increase in injuries. Wimer said the Central Pennsylvania Blood Bank is also currently experiencing "the yearly crunch of summertime," with particular need for type A-negative, type B-negative and type O-negative blood.

Donors at a Red Cross blood drive Friday at Park City Center in Lancaster city were greeted by Damon

Myers, a volunteer "blood ambassador." He said 44 people were scheduled to donate blood Friday, which he said was fairly typical.

"We have a lot of regulars, and so they're able to give blood every couple of months," Myers said. "And so we've actually had a pretty good, solid turnout here today, considering it's vacation season, especially."

One of the people donating blood at the blood drive at Park City on Friday was Jennifer Seymour, of Manheim Township. Seymour said she has type O-negative blood and is a regular donor.

"It's a pretty easy way to help people that are in a bad time in their life," Seymour said.

In the past couple years, both the Red Cross and the Central Pennsylvania Blood Bank have experienced historic blood shortages. Last year, the Red Cross declared its first-ever national blood crisis, saying its blood supplies were at an all-time low. In 2021, the Central Pennsylvania Blood Bank announced its blood supply had fallen to historically low levels. Both Wimer and Red Cross spokesperson Roschella said the current situation isn't as bad as those shortages.

Still, Roschella urged people to go out and donate blood.

"Take a second to think about the families that are in the hospital, who can't go and travel and can't go on vacation right now because they're dealing with a medical situation," Roschella said.



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Sara McCauley, blood drive worker, left, prepares Jennifer Seymour, of Manheim Township, before she donates blood Friday during the American Red Cross blood drive at Park City Center.