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## ANGIE'S LIST GUIDE TO

# Blood Banks

Blood banks are community blood centers that collect donations of blood and blood products from donors. They then test, process, store and supply blood to area medical facilities for use in transfusions for patients.

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The American Red Cross says a person is in need of blood every two seconds in the United States. You can donate at a local blood bank and help those who are in need. (Photo by Katie Jacewicz)

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### Who can donate blood

Community blood centers follow strict guidelines when collecting blood from volunteers. They consider multiple factors during the process. A few examples include the donor's age and weight, medical history and health, medications, blood pressure, pregnancy and any trips that the donor may have taken to other countries.

Most blood collection centers, like the American Red Cross, will accept donations only from volunteers. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) provides regulatory guidance and closely monitors blood collection procedure practices for all blood banks across the United States.

When volunteers visit a blood collection center to donate blood, the staff members will require the completion of a health history form.

Donors are personally interviewed to screen for any potential health risks such as drug use. Questions identifying social behaviors that could lead to infectious diseases such as HIV, hepatitis or syphilis are part of the screening process.

Staff members of community blood centers will also perform a short examination of the donor by taking blood pressure, pulse and temperature. You should be honest during the evaluation process to avoid any potential problems if you think that you shouldn't be donating blood.

### How donated blood is used

Donated blood is collected and used for many purposes. Some examples include replacing blood lost during surgery. Patients undergoing bone marrow transplants need units of platelets and red blood cells during the procedure. Those with anemia need blood transfusions to boost levels of iron in their system. Sickle cell patients may need several units of blood transfusions because of ongoing complications when fighting the disease.

Additional uses for donated blood include platelet apheresis. During the process, blood platelets and plasma are collected from the donor. An apheresis machine separates the red blood cells during collection and returns them back to the donor. Doctors use donated platelets during organ transplant surgery and when treating cancer patients. Blood plasma increases clotting abilities as a method to control bleeding. Leukemia patients can also benefit from platelets.

### How blood donation works

Blood donation is a step-by-step process. Donor registration involves completing a health history form, giving personal contact information and providing valid forms of identification such as a driver's license. A staff member will interview you privately to get an overview of your health. You will be asked questions to learn more about you, including any trips you may have taken outside of the United States. If you are cleared to proceed with the donation, your blood will be collected while you are comfortably seated or lying down. The collection process is quick, taking only about 15 minutes.

Blood donation volunteers rest for a short period after the procedure and are usually provided with fruit juices or snacks to help them revitalize. You may feel light-headed, weak or dizzy for a short period after giving blood. Blood donors are strongly recommended to avoid any type of activity that is overly strenuous for several hours after giving blood. Make sure you keep the bandaged area clean and dry for several hours. After donated blood is collected from volunteers it is tested to determine blood type and to identify any diseases before being distributed. If testing identifies any infectious diseases, the collected blood is rejected and the donor is contacted and informed.

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