

Announcer ([00:00](#)):

Welcome to 'Prep Talk,' the emergency management podcast. Find out what you need to know about preparedness. Get all the latest tips from experts in the field and learn what to do before the next disaster strikes. From the Emergency Management Department in the city that never sleeps, here are your hosts, Omar Bourne and Allison Pennisi.

Omar ([00:27](#)):

Hello everyone. Thank you for listening. I am Omar Bourne.

Allison ([00:30](#)):

And I'm Allison Pennisi, and you are listeners, and as always, we thank you for joining us. We want you to come back as often as you can, so feel free to listen to 'Prep Talk' on your favorite podcast provider. You can also follow us on our social media, on our Twitter [@nycemergencymgt](#), Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and much more.

Omar ([00:51](#)):

This episode, we are going to be discussing the important topic of donating blood. Now, January is National Blood Donor Month, and we're going to be speaking with a representative from the New York Blood Center, who will give you all the information you need to know to help save a life.

Allison ([01:10](#)):

That's right, Omar. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a chronic deficit in blood donations needed for patients in the hospital served by the New York Blood Center. Now more than ever, it is important to donate blood to ensure the city has an adequate supply to support its hospitals and other health care facilities.

Allison ([01:28](#)):

Here to talk to us about this important topic is Andrea Cefarelli, senior executive director of donor recruitment and marketing at the New York Blood Center and its affiliates. Andrea, welcome to 'Prep Talk.'

Andrea ([01:40](#)):

Thank you so much for having me

Omar ([01:42](#)):

Thank you for being here. Let's get right into it. As we've mentioned, January is National Blood Donor Month, but it's important to donate blood at any time of the year. Andrea, tell us about the center's mission here in New York City.

Andrea ([02:00](#)):

New York Blood Center has been serving the New York community for over 55 years. We serve over 200 hospitals with millions of life-saving products, red cells, platelets, plasma, and for the pandemic, the special convalescent plasma that helps people who are battling COVID-19. And we do that with our 19 donor centers and hosting blood drives in the community.

Allison ([02:28](#)):

Andrea, you mentioned this and I mentioned this in my introduction. COVID-19 has significantly affected people's ability to donate blood. Can you remind our listeners about the importance of donating blood, especially during this time?

Andrea ([02:41](#)):

Blood is a perishable product, so red cells last only 42 days. Platelets last five days. And so even before the pandemic, we rely on regular blood donors giving throughout the year. As you approach December, January, we have the holidays. In a traditional year, we would have school breaks, and then we have the challenge of winter weather.

Andrea ([03:11](#)):

With the pandemic, we have had a chronic deficit in blood donations, and that's really because pre-pandemic, we hosted about 550 community blood drives each and every month. And when the pandemic began, those were canceled for a good three months and we've been slowly rebuilding hosting blood drives with organizations in the community, but we're nowhere back to normal.

Andrea ([03:42](#)):

Pre-pandemic, giving blood was as easy as walking down the hallway with a coworker or going to give blood after religious services or giving blood with your friends at a high school or college. Now, giving blood involves finding a location that maybe you've never been to and it's just harder. And of course we have all of the normal impacts right now. Of course, the weather isn't too bad, but you never know if there's a big snow storm around the corner that can further impact our progress.

Omar ([04:17](#)):

As you know, there are some people listening to this episode who may be skeptical about donating blood, especially during this time during the pandemic. What protocols have been implemented to assure our listeners that they are safe, they will be safe when they go out to donate?

Andrea ([04:36](#)):

We at New York Blood Center have gone to extraordinary measures to ensure that both our staff and our blood donors are safe. Pre-pandemic, you could just pop in to any blood drive or a donor center as a walk-in. The first change is that we are about 90 to 95% appointment only. And that really allows us to control the number of donors in each of our operations, whether it be a community blood drive or a donor center.

Andrea ([05:06](#)):

For our community blood drives, that has been one of the challenges because where we used to be able to go to small spaces and we were really creative with setups, we now need larger community rooms in order to make the blood drive setup bigger. We also take the temperatures of our own staff and donors before they enter a community blood drive or a donor center. We of course wipe our tablets where you register between every donor and then our refreshment area, we have separations so that you can enjoy your refreshments just by yourself. Not quite as social as it was pre-pandemic, but all of these are in order to keep our donors safe. Of course, donors must also wear a mask throughout the process.

Allison ([06:02](#)):

Really insightful tips. Andrea, thank you. Tell us, how does the New York Blood Center determine if a person is eligible to donate blood?

Andrea ([06:13](#)):

Sure. About 75% of the population is eligible to give, although people have lots of misconceptions about what might prevent them from giving blood. Many people, especially women say, "my iron is too low," but it really fluctuates. And the only way to be sure is to try. Others think that medications might prevent them from giving blood when in fact many and most medications are fine and often it's the underlying condition that's more of an issue than the particular medication.

Andrea ([06:53](#)):

If you're sick or not well in any way, that's probably a temporary deferral. You certainly have to weigh enough. You have to feel well and healthy, but I've sat with many a first-time donor and most of them when they're enjoying their juice and cookies say, "that wasn't bad." And I think often people think nothing of getting a tattoo or a piercing, but when they think about giving blood, a very common excuse is, "I don't like needles." Well, of course, none of us like needles, but it's a small bit of discomfort, no different than someone battling cancer or leukemia that doesn't like their chemotherapy to be administered through a needle. It's a tiny bit of discomfort for a great reward and a great feeling of saving the life of someone that you will never meet.

Omar ([07:45](#)):

Saving the life of someone you will never meet. That is a profound statement in and of itself. I want to switch gears a little bit to vaccines and blood donations. Can someone donate after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine and where can people go to schedule an appointment?

Andrea ([08:08](#)):

Vaccines are complicated and like many things during the pandemic, seem to be evolving and adapting and changing. I would strongly encourage people to get the latest information on our website at [nybc.org](#). And the reason I say that is because about a week ago, we gave information with a little asterisks on our website that said subject to change and it already has. If you are giving red cells and have the vaccine, you can give blood. Some of the vaccines, because there's different types, require a short deferral, two weeks, two, three weeks, and others, you can give immediately.

Andrea ([08:54](#)):

Giving convalescent plasma, which we haven't yet talked about, but convalescent plasma comes from someone who had COVID-19, is 100% recovered and at least 14 days symptom-free. They donate their convalescent plasma to help someone else battling COVID-19. If you had asked me last week, I would have told you that if someone wants to donate convalescent plasma, they can't have had the vaccine, but we got new guidance and we are working on updating our website. If you've had the vaccine and are interested in donating convalescent plasma, give us a couple of days and we will have the criteria on our website. And I apologize, it's not quite an easy answer because it's evolving with each of the different types of vaccines.

Omar ([09:45](#)):

And for our listeners, I really want to get back to the importance of giving blood not just in January, but throughout the entire year. Can you speak to that and the necessity of why it is so important? You said it beautifully when you say that you can give blood and save a life for someone that you don't know. Can you expound upon that?

Andrea ([10:10](#)):

Yes, absolutely. New York Blood Center requires between 28 and 30,000 blood donations each and every month for the 200 hospitals that we serve for cancer, leukemia, sickle cell patients, newborn babies, routine surgeries. Red cells last just 42 days, so it takes a constant supply of people giving blood. And platelets primarily used by cancer patients or surgeries last just five days, and so we require volunteer blood donors and individuals to step up and host blood drives 12 months of the year. And we're extremely grateful for the generous community, even during a pandemic.

Allison ([10:58](#)):

For our listeners, if you are looking to donate blood or convalescent plasma, as Andrea mentioned, you can visit [nybc.org](#). Andrea, anything you would like to add before we go to rapid response time?

Andrea ([11:11](#)):

Yeah. Well, if you're not eligible to give blood, you can help us by donating a space. It could be a church, a library, a wedding venue. We are very eager to find lots of convenient places for people to donate blood. If you're not eligible for some reason, you can still save lives by helping us find a convenient location for people to give blood.

Allison ([11:38](#)):

And it goes back to what we say on 'Prep Talk' often is that we can contribute to the emergency preparedness of the community as a whole. By donating blood, you are giving back to your community. Andrea, thank you for joining us.

Allison ([11:53](#)):

It is rapid response time. And if you are a first time listener, it's simple. Omar and I will ask questions and our guest will give the first answer that comes to mind. But before rapid response, here's a message from New York City Emergency Management and the Ad Council.

Speaker 5 ([12:10](#)):

Your daughter doesn't want to talk about why her room is a horrible mess. Your son doesn't want to talk about why he's wearing mismatching socks. Your spouse doesn't want to talk about their bad haircut. Families don't have to talk about everything, but they should talk to plan for an emergency. Pack basic supplies in a Go Bag, water, canned food, flashlights, batteries, medical supplies, IDs, and some cash. Talk about where you'll meet in case you lose one another. And of course, don't forget to pack the dog treats. Talk to your family and make an emergency plan. Go to [NYC.gov/readyny](#) or call 311 to make your family's emergency plan. Brought to you by New York City Emergency Management and the ad council.

Speaker 6 ([13:11](#)):

It's time for 'Prep Talk' Rapid Response.

Allison ([13:17](#)):

Okay. First rapid response question. Andrea, what is one emergency item that you cannot live without?

Andrea ([13:24](#)):

My cell phone.

Allison ([13:25](#)):

That's a great answer.

Omar ([13:27](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. We've gotten that one. That's a good answer. You need to stay-

Andrea ([13:31](#)):

As long as it's charged. Charged cell phone.

Omar ([13:35](#)):

There you go. Second question. What is one important emergency tip that people should remember?

Andrea ([13:44](#)):

Wash your hands and wear a mask.

Omar ([13:46](#)):

Oh yes. That is fitting, especially for the times in which we are living. And then I want to lighten it up a little bit here. What is your favorite disaster themed movie or TV show?

Andrea ([14:01](#)):

"Perfect Storm," because I think it fits what we're going through right now.

Omar ([14:06](#)):

Oh yeah.

Allison ([14:07](#)):

Great answer. Great answer. Last but not least, sum up the work you do in one word.

Andrea ([14:15](#)):

I think we save lives.

Allison ([14:19](#)):

Wonderful. For our listeners, if you are interested in donating blood or convalescent plasma or if you want to donate a space to host a blood drive for your community, visit nybc.org. Andrea Cefarelli from New York Blood Center, thank you for joining 'Prep Talk.' We'll see you next time.

Andrea ([14:39](#)):

This transcript was exported on Feb 12, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

Thank you so much for having me.

Allison ([14:41](#)):

And for our listeners, nybc.org. Donate blood, donate plasma, save a life.

Announcer ([14:52](#)):

That's this episode of 'Prep Talk.' If you liked what you heard, you can listen to any time online or through your favorite RSS feed. Until next time, stay safe and prepared.