World Blood Donor Day 2021: Give Blood and Keep the World Beating

Plus: Buy a “Queer Blood America” work by artist Jordan Eagles, who fights the FDA’s discriminatory ban on blood donors.

June 14, 2021 By Trent Straube

Monday, June 14, is World Blood Donor Day 2021. This year’s theme is “Give blood and keep the world beating.”

Spearheaded by the World Health Organization (WHO), the day aims to raise awareness of the importance of donating blood and providing lifesaving blood and blood products, such as plasma, red cells and platelets, to people who need them. It’s also a time to thank the countless volunteers and donors across the globe—especially those who continued their efforts amid the COVID-19 pandemic—and to remind folks to donate blood to ensure there’s a safe supply ready for emergencies.

> It’s World Blood Donor Day! Although we currently are not holding our quarterly SCC blood drives due to #COVID19, we thank all our SCC blood donor heroes for giving the “gift of life!”????????To find a #BloodDrive, visit https://t.co/SUeIgfwrJG. #BloodDonorHero #GiveBlood pic.twitter.com/uMYPcKz1dm
>
> — Virginia State Corporation Commission (@VAStateCorpComm) June 14, 2021

For many health care and civil rights advocates, the day is also an opportunity to battle discriminatory blood donation bans, such as those that prohibit men who have sex with men from donating blood, even when they are in monogamous relationships and are HIV negative.

In the United States, the Red Cross provides about 40% of the country's blood and blood products, all collected by donors. On its website, RedCrossBlood.org, the group offers these facts about blood needs:

- Every 2 seconds someone in the U.S. needs blood and or platelets.
- Approximately 36,000 units of red blood cells are needed every day in the U.S.
- Nearly 7,000 units of platelets and 10,000 units of plasma are needed daily in the U.S.
- Less than 38% of the population is eligible to give blood or platelets.
- Nearly 21 million blood components are transfused each year in the U.S.
- Sickle cell disease affects 90,000 to 100,000 people in the U.S. About 1,000 babies are born with the disease each year. Sickle cell patients can require blood transfusions throughout their lives.
- The average red blood cell transfusion is approximately 3 units.
- A single car accident victim can require as many as 100 units of blood.
- Blood and platelets cannot be manufactured; they can only come from volunteer donors.
- The blood type most often requested by hospitals is type O.
- One donation can potentially save up to three lives.

- According to the American Cancer Society, more than 1.8 million people are expected to be diagnosed with cancer in 2020. Many of them will need blood, sometimes daily, during their chemotherapy treatment.

> It’s World Blood Donor Day and gay men, bisexual men, and some trans people are still unable to give blood in Canada unless they are abstinent for three months. The blood ban is stigmatizing, unscientific, and it needs to end. pic.twitter.com/cUr2yHKNLX
>
> — GayMensSexualHealth (@GMSHAlliance) June 14, 2021

Despite the need for blood donors, not everyone who wants to donate is allowed to do so. The artist Jordan Eagles has been creating works that raise awareness of the U.S. policy that requires gay and bisexual men, but not heterosexuals, to abstain from sex for three months before they can donate blood, regardless of their risk of having HIV and despite the fact that all donated blood is screened for diseases, including HIV.

Earlier this year, in an article titled “Fighting for Your Right…to Donate Blood,” POZ wrote about Eagles’s solo exhibit Can You Save Superman? II, for which he used superhero comics and blood donated by people with HIV and gay men on pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).

“Queer Blood America,” 2021, by Jordan Eagles; made of original 1982 “Captain America,” blood of queer man, collection tube, blue nitrile gloves, plexiglass and UV resin; 10.75 x 8 x 2.75 inches Courtesy of Jordan Eagles and New Discretions

For World Blood Donor Day, Eagles created a new blood-comics work, Queer Blood America, that incorporates a Captain America book from 1982, the same year the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention first used the term “AIDS.” At that time, according to Eagles’s press material, Marvel comics followed a “no gays in the Marvel Universe code.”

Animations from the work will be sold as NFTs (non-fungible tokens, kind of like a one-of-a-kind digital artwork) on the Foundation app to raise money for Visual AIDS, which uses art to raise awareness of HIV, as well as the LGBT Center in Manhattan. You can learn more about Eagles’s project on QueerBloodAmerica.com, which includes an essay on superheroes, homophobia and queer bodies by art curator Ryan Linkoff.

"Queer Blood America,” 2021, by Jordan Eagles, animation stills (30 seconds)Courtesy of Jordan Eagles and New Discretions

Returning to the larger themes of World Blood Donor Day 2021, the WHO states that this year’s objectives are to:

- Thank blood donors in the world and create wider public awareness of the need for regular, unpaid blood donation;

- Promote the community values of blood donation in enhancing community solidarity and social cohesion;

- Encourage youth to embrace the humanitarian call to donate blood and inspire others to do the same;

- Celebrate the potential of youth as partners in promoting health.

The WHO's website about blood safety and availability includes these key facts:

- Of the 118.5 million blood donations collected globally, 40% of these are collected in high-income countries, home to 16% of the world's population.

- In low-income countries, up to 54% of blood transfusions are given to children under 5 years of age; whereas in high-income countries, the most frequently transfused patient group is over 60 years of age, accounting for up to 75% of all transfusions.

- Based on samples of 1,000 people, the blood donation rate is 31.5 donations in high-income countries, 15.9 donations in upper-middle-income countries, 6.8 donations in lower-middle-income countries and 5.0 donations in low-income countries.

- An increase of 7.8 million blood donations from voluntary unpaid donors has been reported from 2013 to 2018. In total, 79 countries collect over 90% of their blood supply from voluntary unpaid blood donors; however, 56 countries collect more than 50% of their blood supply from family/replacement or paid donors.

- Only 55 of 171 reporting countries produce plasma-derived medicinal products (PDMP) through the fractionation of plasma collected in the reporting country. A total of 90 countries reported that all PDMP are imported, 16 countries reported that no PDMP were used during the reporting period and 10 countries did not respond to the question.

Today is World Blood Donor Day, interested in helping save lives? find out more with the Canadian Blood Services https://t.co/Nf9XUpzlDz #GiveBlood pic.twitter.com/kWFiwdsQ0l

— Mount Pleasant Group (@MPGC_GTA) June 14, 2021

In related news, read "Can Your Blood Type Predict Your Chances of Developing Illnesses?" and "Scientists Discover Way to Boost Universal Donor Blood." You can also take the POZ Poll: Do You Know Your Blood Type?

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