March 26, 2020

RE: Blood Donors Supporting Essential Critical Infrastructure

To Whom It May Concern:

Nebraska Community Blood Bank (NCBB) is the blood collection and distribution supplier for eastern Nebraska, including the greater Omaha area. We supply blood products to many of Nebraska’s major healthcare facilities, including Level 1 Trauma hospitals and other regional hospitals, to support the health of Nebraska’s communities.

Nebraska Community Blood Bank has been designated by the federal Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency of the US Department of Homeland Security as a critical infrastructure entity. The attached letter (below) from the Federal Emergency Management Agency sets forth the criticality of blood centers as part of our public health infrastructure.

As a member of the essential critical infrastructure, we have a special responsibility during the COVID-19 pandemic to continue operations. In order to continue normal operations it is imperative that volunteer blood donors be allowed to travel to and from blood collection locations.

**We are providing this letter to our blood and cell therapy donors who have scheduled appointments with us so that they may provide this lifesaving blood or bone marrow donation at this critical time.**

Please contact Dr. Jed Gorlin at 651-332-7108 or Ms. Kathy Geist at 651-332-7288 if you have questions about this letter of certification. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Kathryn Geist
Senior Executive Director
March 19, 2020

Dear Emergency Management Agency,

I appreciate all that you and your team are doing to respond to the Coronavirus (COVID 19) pandemic. I am writing to make you aware of an important aspect of your emergency public health response. Many of the blood drives that are critical to ensuring an adequate supply of blood to treat patients in hospitals who need emergency surgery or trauma patients have been cancelled at workplaces and college campuses across the country. Your assistance is needed to ensure that your jurisdiction’s emergency planning efforts appropriately prioritize the availability and accessibility of blood and blood products.

Blood and blood products are an essential treatment in trauma and are also required to meet the needs of patients with chronic conditions. During a time of crisis, patient access to blood and blood products is often critical. In the U.S., blood is typically collected, processed, and stored at regional non-profit blood centers and is distributed to hospitals on a daily or weekly basis. In some cases, a blood center may be located several hours away from the hospitals it supplies; thus, problems with the local infrastructure can create a set of logistical challenges that can impact the availability and accessibility of blood and blood products.

Blood supply is recognized by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as essential and integral component of the Emergency Support Function (ESF) #8 of the National Response Framework. Under ESF#8, HHS monitors and coordinates the need for blood and blood products and related medical supplies in coordination with the American Association Blood Banks (AABB) Interorganizational Task Force on Domestic Disasters and Acts of Terrorism (AABB Disaster Task Force).

Despite the recognized importance of the safety and availability of blood in disasters, blood centers have encountered recent obstacles during disasters and emergencies. For example, in the aftermath of recent events, some blood centers encountered difficulties (1) obtaining fuel for generators that are needed to collect and maintain blood supplies and for vehicles (including staff vehicles); (2) accessing emergency transportation (helicopters and vehicles) to distribute blood and blood products with a limited shelf-life; (3) having utilities restored; (4) gaining re-entry access into affected areas; and/or (5) procuring reliable access to emergency communications and frequencies. These deficits represent significant vulnerabilities in our readiness, and place patients, including disaster survivors who may need blood and blood products for injuries, as well as patients with an ongoing need for transfusion-related therapies, at unwarranted risk.

I respectfully request your assistance in working with the community blood centers in your region to ensure that blood and blood products are available where and when they are needed in a disaster.

www.fema.gov
Donating blood is a safe process and people should not hesitate to give. It's important to note that blood drives have the highest standards of safety and infection control. We need your support to make sure healthy individuals in your community know that we need them to still donate blood as volunteer blood donors are the only source of blood for those in need. Just as the social distancing guidance recommends that it's okay for people to leave home for necessities like groceries, or a doctor's visit, or the pharmacy—donating blood is a necessity.

Longer term, this can be accomplished by integrating the community blood centers responsible for the collection and distribution of blood and blood products into your emergency management planning efforts, including the addition of blood-related scenarios in your drill and exercise programs. I also ask that your agency considers developing plans that ensure Food and Drug Administration (FDA) licensed or registered blood centers are appropriately prioritized for access to fuel, emergency communications equipment and frequencies, transportation during disasters, restoration of utilities, and re-entry access into affected disaster areas.

The AABB Disaster Task Force has encouraged all community blood centers to contact their emergency management agencies to participate in the emergency management planning process. The AABB Disaster Task Force also advocates the education of emergency management personnel on the unique needs of collecting and distribution blood and blood products to victims of a disaster while maintaining routine support for ongoing patient care. As you revise and exercise your ESF#8 plans, the blood collection facilities and the AABB Disaster Task Force should be an asset and considered essential partners in preparedness planning.

I appreciate your prompt attention to this important issue and thank you for your ongoing commitment to preparing for and protecting the public during disasters.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]

Pete Gaynor
Administrator

cc: AABB Disaster Task Force