

## **A Direct Look Into How The West Chester Blood Donation Center is Struggling During The Pandemic**

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**By Lauren Turman (JAC 310 assignment for Prof. Waltz)**

The COVID-19 pandemic has decreased donations and widened blood shortages at the American Red Cross West Chester Blood Donation Center. These dwindling numbers have caused the Center to take new measures to attract more donors.

Nationally, the American Red Cross needs a donation two times per second, according to its website. Now, it's only receiving one donation every one 1.5 seconds, which is only a third of what it needs.

"In this crucial time, people are not showing up the way they used to," said Marsha, a medical assistant who asked that her last name not be published.

The WCBDC is the third highest recipient of blood donations in Chester County but has received 64 percent fewer donations in the eight months between March and October than it received in two months during January and February.

"We've given Red Cross socks, music gift cards, and are currently giving away Amazon gift cards because we really would like to see these numbers going back up," Marsha said. "It's funny because we never thought that we would have to try this hard."

Marsha is not alone in trying to increase donations, even nationwide. Only 6.8 million people in the United States donate blood, even though 38 percent of the population is eligible. In the Greater Pennsylvania region, 443,000 people across the state donate: this year, that number reflects 270,000 so far. Nationally, 80 percent of donors donate again after the first time.

Even in years past, blood shortages have been problematic in Pennsylvania. All of the centers came up short in 2018, reaching about three-quarters of its estimated goal with 331,000 donors. The pandemic has caused shortages to be much greater, which affects the amount of help that each region can provide to people in need.

The scarcity of donors has also caused rates at the WCBDC to drop by almost 65 percent. National and local representatives have issued at least three daily calls to prior donors from all Pennsylvania blood donation centers to encourage them to give and help close the blood shortage.

A recent visit by a four-time donor to the WCBDC – prompted by dozens of calls – revealed that things have changed since COVID-19 hit.

As usual, donor's temperatures, heart rate, iron count, and antibodies were checked.

Three other donors were there, separated by Plexiglas, versus the usual seven to 10. All nurses wore masks and face shields and changed their

gloves after using disinfectant wipes on the equipment after each donation. The tables were wiped down at least twice.

"This is now a mandate for us. We could be responsible for getting someone sick if we do not wipe at least twice," said Nurse Amy, who asked that her last name not be published

One new instruction for donors was if they felt sick at any time, they should let nurses know so the donation could immediately be stopped, something I had never heard before.

"We don't know how all parts of the virus works, so if you feel any symptoms that align, we need to have you stop and exit immediately," medical assistant Marsha said.

Usually, after a donation donors are offered juice, a seat, and maybe cookies. Now, donors are presented with an Amazon gift card and promptly escorted out. The usually hearty "thank yous" were the same.

With annual donations reduced from almost 10,000 to 3,600 in West Chester and an increased demand for blood, both the Center and the entire American Red Cross wonder how they can fulfill their mission.

"The only way we know how to move forward is through initiative and just hope that we can overcome the virus and get some donors back," said Amy. "This isn't like food or something manufactured. All of the blood has to come from willing donors."