

Canadian Blood Services dealing with shortages as people increasingly haven't shown up for appointments

By Rob Paul

In recent weeks, Canadian Blood Services (CBS) has announced blood shortages in Canada.

With pandemic restrictions easing and Canada beginning to open up, there's been an increased demand for blood.

Last month, CBS stated they would need more than 23,000 donors by the end of July to meet the unprecedented demands that have come as a result of the reopening.

In Caledon, Canadian Blood Services has always held donation clinics at two different locations. They're held at the Albion Bolton Community Centre every other month on a Tuesday and in Caledon East at the Royal Ambassador four times a year on a Thursday.

CBS' Donor Relations and Collections Territory Manager Elaine St. Pierre explains that the blood donation process is all about working quickly in as many communities as they can to ensure they're reaching as many eligible Canadians as possible.

"At Canadian Blood Services we operate 35 permanent centres across the country and then we have about 4,000 mobile events we run every single year in communities across the land," she said. "Bolton and Caledon East are our two spots where we come into town at regular intervals when the donors are eligible to donate again.

"We set up our events in a short period of time and collect as much blood as we can and then we get out and rush the blood to our facility that's located in Brampton for testing, processing, and packaging before we deliver it to hospitals. It's a constant revolving door of in and out. Everyday we're somewhere in the Region collecting blood. It's because of the short shelf life of blood that we have to do it this way."

St. Pierre says there's been difficulties for them throughout the pandemic, but Caledon has been one of the stronger communities when it comes to blood donations thanks to both the Town and its residents.

"We're seeing a strain on our inventory right now," she said. "When the pandemic happened there were a number of issues that presented across the country—venues closing, increased cancellations—but I have to really give praise to the Town of Caledon for really stepping up at the very onset and recognizing that we were absolutely an essential service and knowing full well that we were following all public health requirements.

"We never missed a single event in Caledon, we were always able to hold our events throughout the pandemic—I can't say that for every community throughout the country, so we really give praise to the Town of Caledon for still allowing us to come in. Couple that with us having a very committed donor base in Caledon, it has really served us well."

The pandemic didn't initially impact the CBS' inventory due to surgeries being put on hold and people rarely leaving their homes; now with measures limiting capacity it's thrown a wrinkle into the process.

"At the very beginning of the pandemic, while we did have a lot of cancellations and closures and were collecting less blood, as everything shut down the demand went down as well—procedures were on hold, people weren't on the roads as much," said St. Pierre. "We were blessed that we went into the pandemic with a strong inventory in the country and that served us very well. While we were collecting less, the demand was down.

"Now fast forward to us getting used to everything in the pandemic, the reason we're in a bit of a situation now is we've had to put in a lot of additional measures like businesses, and in some cases that has impacted capacity. The measures are there to protect our

donors, staff, and volunteers, but ultimately it has meant that we can collect less blood each day. In a lot of cases, we've been expanding our hours as much as possible, but we are still greatly reducing the amount of donors we can see every day vs. before the pandemic.?

The lack of consistent donors and COVID measures capping the amount of people CBS can see when they go into communities has begun to catch up as life starts to return to normal with hospitals ramping up surgeries again.

?When you couple the reduced capacity with the now-rising demand for blood and the lower attendance rates we've been seeing, our inventory has dwindled and it's pretty tight right now,? St. Pierre said. ?Basically, the demand for blood products has increased above the pre-pandemic levels now as most regions across the country have begun the phase in their reopening plans. What that is doing is it's allowing hospitals to ramp up and clear the backlog of surgical procedures that were put on hold. The demand is back up with the hospitals looking for everything they were before the pandemic, but our capacity is still reduced because of COVID measures.?

Another factor in the blood shortages, says St. Pierre, is that people just haven't been showing up to their booked appointments and it's become an increasing problem as the Province continues to open.

?We've also been seeing a lower attendance rate, appointments are required to attend a blood donation event and what we're seeing is that people are grabbing up those spots well in advance of the clinics, but by the time the date rolls around we're seeing a lot of people not show up or cancel last minute. Because everyone has to have an appointment, those missed and cancelled spots are very difficult for us to fill on short notice.

?We understand that as things open up that while donating blood at the height of the pandemic was just about the only thing you could do, now there's lots of things going on and people have other things on their mind. The message has got to be to the community, that if you're lucky enough to book a donation spot then please keep it. It's only an hour of your day and it will really make an impact for a hospital patient in need.?

There are upcoming blood donation clinics in Caledon over the next few months. In Bolton, the next one will be Tuesday, September 6 and the next time the clinic will be in Caledon East is Thursday, October 21.

?As far out in advance as the Bolton clinic is, it's already fully booked which is great, but we need to make sure people keep their appointments,? St. Pierre said. ?If you're really interested in donating then the best thing you can do is keep on checking back because appointments could become available in the days leading up to the event.

?There's a tendency to think if you miss your appointment there will be somewhere there to fill it but that's not always the case. We really need people to make the effort to keep their appointments. We encourage people to check their eligibility at [blood.ca](#) or download the Give Blood app. Only one in two Canadians is eligible to donate that, and if that's you, we need you.?