

New Tecumseth has continued blood donations during the pandemic

In some communities, blood donation clinics were cancelled as the municipal buildings used as donor centres closed due to COVID-19.

Fortunately for New Tecumseth, Councillor Stephanie MacLellan and Town staff worked together to find solutions so Canadian Blood Services could continue collecting from the community without skipping a beat.

"In mid-March when everything started to close down, we did experience a lot of cancellations of both group appointments and individuals," said Elaine St. Pierre, Canadian Blood Services Territory Manager for South Simcoe.

But, since that time, she says things have greatly improved.

"We have seen a real uptick of people coming out to support us, which has been so heartwarming and the generosity of Canadians is really something I'm sure we're all witnessing in a number of different areas around the country," St. Pierre said.

While there hasn't been an overall increase in blood donations, the demand has dropped with fewer motor vehicle accidents due to less traffic on roadways and elective surgeries being put on hold at the moment.

"What I would say is we're holding the line," St. Pierre remarked. "We were very fortunate to have a strong inventory when this [pandemic] happened initially."

Going forward, St. Pierre said the need for blood is only going to increase as the provincial government relaxes restrictions and hospitals get back to performing elective surgeries.

"We're likely going to see that demand goes up, but we're hoping that by Canadians making appointments in the weeks and months ahead, we can continue to maintain that inventory to help hospital patients," she said.

As the COVID-19 pandemic creates more free time for many, there's no better time to donate, said St. Pierre.

The novel coronavirus cannot be transmitted through blood transfusions and measures are in place to protect individuals from COVID-19 during blood donor clinics.

"We want everyone to know that it is safe to donate blood during COVID-19 and, in fact, it's critical for patients who are relying on blood inside products everyday," St. Pierre stressed.

Across Canada, 52 per cent of people say they or a family member needed blood at some point in their lives and shockingly, only about 50 per cent of Canadians are qualified to donate.

St. Pierre said the limited pool of eligible Canadians to draw from makes it critical for those who are eligible to donate.

The Tottenham Community Centre's (139 Queen St. N) is hosting its next blood donation drive on Saturday, May 30, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and again on Wednesday, June 17 from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

"We're very grateful to the Town's staff for stepping up and realizing the essential nature of the services that we provide and offering to open up the community centre for us," St. Pierre said.

"It has been such a relief to know that we can still continue to collect blood locally from the residents and not make them drive, to say, one of our permanent centres in Barrie or elsewhere."

In Alliston, St. Paul's Catholic Church (190 King St. S) is used as a blood donor clinic and its next event is scheduled June 4, from 2:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

"Father's been such a great host to us over the years," St. Pierre said.

"When all this happened, they were one of the first ones to step up as well? even though the church isn't open for anything else, they said we can continue to run our events there in the church hall, which has been fabulous."

Anyone who's interested in donating is encouraged to visit www.blood.ca or call 1-888-2-DONATE and see if their eligible to schedule an appointment. Canadian Blood Services is no longer accepting walk-ins because of COVID-19 and venue capacity limitations.

"The donation process only takes about an hour and you're really having a direct impact on someone's life," St. Pierre stressed.

"There's patients who need that blood every single day and regardless of whether there's a pandemic, babies are still being born, people still have cancer, there are still traumas happening out there," she added.

"It's just something that can be done in a very short period of time that can have such a great impact."

By Sam Odrowski Local Journalism Initiative Reporter