

Blood Donations Surge Following Bourbon Street Attack

Carolyn Scofield

scofield@tulane.edu

January 03, 2025 4:20 PM



Two days after a driver raced down Bourbon Street, killing 14 people and injuring dozens of others, hundreds of people waited patiently to donate blood. Tim Peterson, MD, Assistant Professor of Pathology at Tulane University School of Medicine and Medical Director for The Blood Center, isn't surprised by the turnout. New Orleans always shows up when there's a need.

"We had an emergency opening of our center in Metairie on New Year's Day and collected more than 125 units of blood in about four hours," said Peterson, a board-certified transfusion medicine specialist who teaches Tulane medical students and residents about blood components, collections, and usage. As medical director of both The Blood Center and the blood bank at East Jefferson General Hospital, Peterson manages more than 80% of the blood supply in the state.

“Beginning yesterday, we have all our 11 fixed donor center sites open and three mobile blood drives set up at locations, all open from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. I just came from our main headquarters on Canal Street, where at least 100 people are waiting to donate,” he said.

Whole blood donations are separated into platelets, plasma, and red blood cells, and those components are used in various treatments. Platelets help the blood clot and are vital to trauma patients, cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy or radiation, and transplant recipients. However, platelets have a shelf life of only five days, making consistent donations critical.

The components used Wednesday morning as patients poured into University Medical Center were available thanks to people who donated on the last days of 2024. Most of those patients are now stabilized but will need more blood products in the coming weeks and months. Peterson hopes the people waiting in the long lines this week will become regular donors.

“There are some statistics that show if every person who donated one pint of blood a year donated twice a year, there would never be a shortage in how much blood or blood specific type that would be needed,” Peterson said.

Dr. Peterson’s dual roles as a medical director and educator underscore the importance of managing the blood supply and preparing future clinicians. “Our goal is for students to carry forward the knowledge that every donation makes a profound impact,” he explained. His efforts to teach transfusion medicine ensure that Tulane students are skilled clinicians and advocates for the vital role of blood donation in saving lives.

To learn more about blood donation and register for an appointment, visit [The Blood Center](#) website.