

African American blood donors needed in Massachusetts

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The number of African Americans donating blood with the Red Cross has dropped by more than half since the COVID-19 outbreak began in mid-March, and African American donors are critically needed to help patients battling sickle cell disease, according to the Massachusetts Health Council.

The cancellation of blood drives at businesses, churches, and schools, along with the disproportionately high COVID-19 infection rate among African Americans, is contributing to the lower donor turnout, which is concerning since African American donors are vital for patients with rare blood types, like sickle cell disease, who depend on blood that must be matched very closely to reduce the risk of complications.

The American Red Cross, with New England Patriots players Devin and Jason McCourty, the Rev. Liz Walker of Roxbury Presbyterian Church, Clappazzola Partners, and other community groups, plans a five-hour blood drive starting at 10 a.m. on June 30 at Northeastern University's Matthews Arena, according to the council. "Sickle cell has affected our family and watching our family fight inspired us to get involved," Devin McCourty said.

According to the council, healthy individuals who are feeling well may also make an appointment to donate by downloading the free Red Cross Blood Donor App, visiting [RedCrossBlood.org](https://www.RedCrossBlood.org), calling 1-800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767) or enabling the Blood Donor Skill on any Alexa Echo device.

"Blood transfusion helps patients with sickle cell disease – the most common genetic blood disease in the U.S. – and

African American donors play an important role in their treatment,” said Dr. Yvette Miller, executive medical officer, Red Cross Blood Services. “We want to assure donors that their health and safety is a top priority for the Red Cross. By adding safeguards to our drives in response to this coronavirus, we hope individuals will roll up a sleeve to help those counting on their donation.”