

# How can I Help Patients with Unique (rare) Blood Types?



**You're the right type**

Thank you for being a blood donor!

**Become a Blood Donor.  
Encourage others to give.  
Sponsor a blood drive.**

RWJ New Brunswick Blood Services  
**732-235-8100 ext. 221**

RWJ Somerset Blood Services  
**908-685-2926**

Visit [giveblood.rwjbh.org](http://giveblood.rwjbh.org)



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### Why is a unique blood type important?

When a patient receives a blood transfusion, they are matched to a type of donor blood based on the major ABO blood groups (this is referred to as “ABO” and “Rh” blood type).

Each of us has a unique blood type that determines the unique traits we inherit, such as hair, skin and eye color from our parents. This makes it very difficult to find matching blood types needed for patients of our community’s many different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

For an estimated 5% of patients, we need to find blood that is a more specific match and lacks certain antigens.

At RWJBarnabas Health Blood Services (RWJBH) we test for the absence of these antigens, also referred to as screening or testing for rare or unique blood. At RWJBH, we also collect donations from multi-cultural donors to maintain a diverse inventory of antigen negative/unique blood.

### Why do we need unique blood type donations?

When a patient receives a transfusion of blood carrying the same antigens as his or her own blood, the donor red cells are not recognized as foreign and are beneficial to the patient. If the patient does not receive the same antigens, they may develop resistance to the transfused antigens. Their body may then reject or react with future transfusions of blood with these antigens.

### Who might need blood that is matched for unique blood types?

Patients who are transfused very often, such as those with sickle cell disease, thalassemia or cancer can easily form antibodies to some red cell antigens. Once antibodies form, these patients require very precisely matched transfusions to prevent transfusion reactions and production of more antibodies. We try to reduce this problem by giving blood from donors of the same ethnic and racial group to prevent the possibility of incompatibility.

### Can anyone donate?

Blood donors must be at least 17 years old (or 16 years old with parent/guardian’s written permission), weigh a minimum of 110 pounds (or 120 pounds, if 16 years old) and in general good health.

#### Facts

- 1 in 500 African Americans and 1 in 1,400 Latinos are born with sickle cell disease.
- It also affects people from the Caribbean, Middle East, India and the Mediterranean.
- 3 in 10 of Mediterranean (Greek/Italian) Americans, 5 in 100 of Southeast Asian/Middle Eastern and 3 in 100 of African/Hispanic Americans carry the gene for Thalassemia (congenital disorder of formation of hemoglobin).
- An estimated 1 in 100 cancer patients can form antibodies to red cells after transfusion.

