

Rules and regulations for giving blood

One out of every three people will need blood in his or her lifetime. The United States alone uses 38,000 units of blood each day. Each unit of blood given can help up to three people, and yet less than 5 percent of healthy Americans actually donate blood, reported Dr. Moira Larsen, a pathologist at Good Samaritan Hospital, Baltimore.

Anyone who is 17 years of age or older, weighs 110 pounds or more, and is healthy can donate blood. Before people donate, they are asked a series of questions about their medical history and any medications they are taking.

“Losing that pint of blood can stress a person’s body,” said Dr. Larsen. “Sometimes people are deferred from donating blood for a certain amount of time.”

Dr. Larsen said after traveling out of the country, she had to wait a year before donating blood to make sure she hadn’t caught any diseases. She said everyone works to make sure the blood supply is clean. Each unit of blood is tested for multiple diseases.

“When you give blood, you want to do it at a time when you feel healthy. Not when you are tired or run down,” said Dr. Larsen, who has been with Good Samaritan for more than 15 years.

A person can donate blood every 56 days. This will give your body a chance to get the volume of red blood cells back to its normal level, said Dr. Larsen. Donating blood takes about 10-12 minutes, but it can seem longer, she said.

Dr. Larsen recommends drinking plenty of fluids and avoiding caffeine after giving blood. Wait an hour before having a cigarette and don’t do any heavy lifting, she said.

Juice and cookies are given out as a thank you so people will stick around for a few more minutes. This gives the staff time to start the rehydration process and to make sure their donors aren’t dizzy, said Dr. Larsen.