

Automated blood collection, or apheresis (a-fuh-ree-sus), is the future of blood donation. This is where we remove your whole blood, run it through a centrifuge, take the blood components we need, and then return the other components to you. Of the three main components - which are platelets, plasma, and red cells - we're focusing on collecting as many platelets as possible.

Where you can donate whole blood every two months, you can donate platelets every seven days! Though, since you're only allowed 24 donations within a 12-month period we recommend that our regular donors come in every 2-3 weeks. The reason we need a high number of regular donors is simple: platelets only have a shelf-life of five days. In those five days the donation needs to be tested and then shipped to the hospital/patient in need, so the more regular platelet donors the better!

With a whole blood donation we generally say to free up 45 minutes to an hour of your time to ensure you have the time to "refresh." This basically means we want to make sure you're not light headed and that you don't feel any negative effects after your donation. When you donate platelets we ask that you free up two hours of your time (though it rarely takes that long) so nothing is rushed - this includes filling out our questionnaire, being screened, time spent in the chair, and then refreshment time after. I'd say the average platelet donor spends about 75-90 minutes in the chair, but that all depends on your pre-count. Some people take 65 minutes to give one unit of platelets while a rare few take 50 minutes to give three units.

Before I forget to mention, don't think that if you give a single your donation isn't worth the time spent. *Every* unit collected goes to a patient in need.

Hospitals are asking for more and more platelets these days because of the wide range of patients they go to help in their concentrated form. Platelets can be used to aid trauma victims, bone marrow transplant recipients, heart surgery patients, and those suffering from cancer and leukemia. Chemotherapy and other radiation therapies tend to destroy a high volume of platelets, which is another reason that a high volume is used so frequently.

Starting in February we will be sending out a mobile that will be set up exclusively for collecting platelets. That means that anyone outside of the Eureka area who has been interested in trying apheresis but hasn't wanted to make the round-trip drive will be more able to; especially for people in the Crescent City and Garberville areas. We will be hoping to schedule 4-6 donors per drive in order to collect the units that we need so we can keep our local hospitals well supplied. The platelet mobile will be out every Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Monday, and I will be making calls and setting up appointments for the mobile every week.

Long story short, the more regular platelet donors we can establish in our small area the more we're guaranteeing that people will have what they need when they need it. We're also able to help out hospitals in other counties (and sometimes different states) thanks to the donations we collect. Whether you want to come in every two weeks or every two months, we're always accepting new platelet donors; come on down to the platelet mobile and see what you think!