Donating blood

In the United States, someone needs donor blood every two seconds. That’s what makes donating blood so important! While 38 percent of Americans are eligible to donate blood, only 5 percent do so.

During the winter months, the available blood supply drops. Donors often have difficulty getting to blood centers due to illness, travel or weather conditions. Unfortunately, sick and injured people can’t wait for the roads to clear or the temperature to rise before they need transfusions. Donors of all blood types are needed throughout the year.

Here are some facts about donor blood types from the Red Cross:

✦ The most common blood type is Type O Positive. It is also the most common type requested by hospitals.

✦ Type 0 Negative is a rare blood type: Only nine percent of the population has it. It is also the “universal donor” and can be transfused into anyone.

✦ Type AB Positive plasma can likewise be transfused into anyone.

Here are some ways faith communities can promote blood donations:

Host a blood drive: The American Red Cross and LifeSource work with organizations to organize on-site blood drives.

Carpool: If there are people in your congregation who want to donate blood but don’t like to drive in bad weather, organize a carpool to the local blood center.

Volunteer: Congregants who can’t donate blood due to medical or other issues can still volunteer at blood centers and blood drives.

Announce the need: Many people may not be aware that there is a great need for blood donations in the winter months. You can announce this need in bulletins, newsletters and group meetings.

Dear God, we thank you for the gift of a new year. Bless all of us with health, joy and love. Amen.

Resources: Advocatehealth.com • American Red Cross: redcrossblood.org • LifeSource: lifesource.org

Winter sports and brain injuries

Winter sports such as ice skating and skiing are a great way to keep active during the colder months. But these sports can also put you and your family at risk of traumatic brain injuries (TBI). In fact, the American Academy of Neurology states that 20,000 of the 300,000 brain injuries that occur each year happen while the sufferer is participating in winter sports. TBIs can occur when someone falls and hits his/her head or is struck in the head by an object.

Head injuries should never be ignored, and children and adults who suffer a head injury should seek medical attention immediately. TBIs can have a long-lasting impact on a person’s health and, in serious cases, can lead to permanent impairment or death.

Special care should be taken when participating in winter sports. Both children and adults should wear a protective helmet, and, if it is damaged during an accident, they should replace it with a new one. People who exercise outside should also be careful: Sidewalks and streets are slippery, increasing the chance of falls for walkers, runners and cyclists.

There are several things that faith communities can do to help prevent TBIs. These include:

• Require head protection for participants in sports and activities.

• Contact medical professionals immediately when someone at a congregational activity suffers a head injury.

• Take care of the community’s property to reduce the risk of falls.

• Clear and salt sidewalks and steps during the winter.

• If snow or ice is present, establish a volunteer group to assist those needing help walking to and from their cars safely.

Both clergy and lay leaders can educate themselves about traumatic brain injury and its effects on individuals and families. For both, living with TBI is a challenge. Congregations can provide a strong support system and an inclusive community for these individuals.

Resources: Advocatehealth.com • Brainline.org: brainline.org • Brain Injury Association: biausa.org