



Sixteen-Year-Olds Soon Eligible to Donate Blood in Minnesota

ST. PAUL, Minn. (March 18, 2008) – Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty signed legislation today that will allow eligible 16-years-olds to donate blood in Minnesota beginning July 1, 2008 with written parental/guardian consent.

With only 38 percent of the United States population eligible to give blood, and just a fraction of those actually donating, Minnesota's three blood collection organizations of voluntary blood donations – the American Red Cross, Mayo Clinic and Memorial Blood Centers – supported the legislation, which was spurred by 16-year-old Joe Gibson of Blooming Prairie, Minnesota. Gibson worked with Representative Patti Fritz to introduce the legislation in the Minnesota House of Representatives and Senator Kathy Sheran to introduce the bill in the Minnesota Senate. Gibson, a sophomore at Blooming Prairie High School, wanted to donate blood last year when he was 15-years-old but could not because he was too young.

“This legislation can help increase the number of eligible donors, foster a commitment to blood donation and enhance our ability to meet the growing demand for blood,” said Rick Panning, CEO of the American Red Cross North Central Blood Services Region. “Many of today’s committed blood donors began donating while in high school.”

Youth blood donors are an important part of the Red Cross’ blood donation program. Currently, approximately 20 percent of blood donations made to the Red Cross comes from high school and college blood drives.

Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle signed a similar bill on Friday, March 14, 2008 which also lowers the blood donor age to 16 with parent/guardian consent.

Eligible donors can call **1.800.GIVE.LIFE** or go online to givebloodgivelife.org to make an appointment to donate blood. A blood donor card or driver’s license are required at check-in. Currently donors must be at least 17 years old and must weigh at least 110 pounds.

The St. Paul, Minnesota-based North Central Blood Services Region supplies blood products and specialized laboratory services to more than 100 hospitals in Minnesota, western Wisconsin and eastern South Dakota. In a lifesaving partnership with approximately 127,000 volunteer blood donors, 4,000 volunteer blood drive coordinators and 630 staff members, the North Central Blood Services Region organizes nearly 5,000 blood drives in an effort to collect approximately 240,000 pints of blood each year for patients in need.

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