

Talking with your educators

Starting the conversation

If you're a student and have decided to donate blood stem cells, it's important to inform your instructors, advisors and coaches early on about the donation process. Discussing your needs and how they can support you will help manage the time commitment associated with donation and recovery. This may affect your class attendance, school deadlines, athletic training and competitions. This guide provides answers to common questions your instructors and coaches might have, along with talking points to help you communicate effectively.

Donation process

Q: What is blood stem cell donation, and what are you being asked to do?

- Blood stem cell donation involves giving healthy blood-forming cells to replace a patient's unhealthy cells for those battling blood cancers or diseases. There are two methods of donation: peripheral blood stem cell (PBSC) and bone marrow collection. The patient's doctor decides which method is best for the patient.
- **PBSC donation** is a nonsurgical procedure that takes place at a blood center or outpatient hospital facility.
 - The PBSC donation process is called apheresis and is similar to plasma donation, but it typically takes longer.
 - If I'm asked to donate PBSC, I will receive injections of medication for five consecutive days to increase the number of healthy cells in my body. During this time, I may experience symptoms like fatigue, headaches or body aches. My donation happens on the fifth day.
- **Marrow donation** is a same-day surgical outpatient procedure that takes place in a hospital operating room.
 - I will be under anesthesia while doctors withdraw marrow from my pelvic bone.

Q: How did you get selected to be a donor?

- I joined the NMDP RegistrySM. Every search through NMDPSM provides patients with access to more than 42 million potential donors in the world. Any of us could be identified as a match for a stranger in need of a transplant.
- The organization matches volunteer donors like me with thousands of patients who have blood cancers like leukemia and lymphoma, sickle cell or other life-threatening diseases. A transplant can be the only treatment option that could save their life.

Q: Why is being a match for a patient so important?

- Seventy-five percent of patients who need a transplant don't have a fully matched donor in their family and turn to NMDP to find an unrelated donor. I may be the best match to help this patient.
- Matching a patient and donor is more complex than just matching blood types. It involves several factors, the most critical being the human leukocyte antigen (HLA) type. HLA are proteins—or markers—found on most cells in the body, and a close match is essential for a successful transplant.

Conversation tip: Consider sharing with your instructors where and why you joined the registry in the first place. This might help them understand your motivation for wanting to help someone you don't even know.

Time commitment

Q: How will the donation process affect your class schedule? Will you miss classes, important deadlines or exam dates?

- If I'm asked to donate, I may need to miss some classes or request extensions for my coursework. The donation process typically requires a time commitment of 20–30 hours spread over a 4-to-6-week period, which can lead to some schedule conflicts. A physician note can be provided if required.
- As part of the donation process, I will need to attend an information session, undergo blood tests and complete a physical exam. These activities are essential to ensure that the donation is safe for both me and the patient.
- My donation date is determined by the patient's transplant team, and it's crucial to meet this date to keep their treatment on track. This may also involve travel time and additional appointments.

Conversation tip: Before talking to your instructors, research your school and instructors' policies for missed classes, and review your course syllabus for key dates (e.g., presentations or exams). If you participate in work study, international study or have scholarships, check with your advisor to see whether absences impact eligibility for continued involvement in these programs.

Conversation tip: Suggest potential solutions to meet key deadlines to your instructors. This could include submitting coursework electronically, turning in work early or taking exams in advance.

Q: Is the time commitment for the two types of donations the same?

- While the overall time commitment for both marrow and PBSC donation is similar, there are some differences in the timing and nature of commitments.
- If I'm asked to donate PBSC, this could affect my participation in sports or other activities before the donation because of the time spent at appointments to receive the medication.
- If I'm asked to donate marrow, more recovery time is needed after the donation.
- Both processes are essential and involve a total commitment of about 20–30 hours over a 4-to-6-week period, but the distribution of time differs.

Q: Will you miss consecutive classes for the donation process, or will it affect classes once in a while?

- The time commitment for donation process can vary and may be spread out over several weeks, depending on a number of factors such as travel, the patient's condition and specific steps involved. As a result, I may need some flexibility in my class schedule.
- The appointments leading up to the donation and the donation itself might not always be consecutive, but they may require some adjustments to my regular routine.

Q: Will your appointments and donation take place nearby?

- I may be asked to travel for the donation or any of the steps in the donation process. Travel is based on the needs and timeline of the patient and the donor.
- After donating, my cells are transported via courier directly to the patient's location, eliminating the need for me to travel.

Q: Do you have formal documentation (like a doctor's note) to verify that you've been identified as a potential donor?

- Yes, I can authorize my donor specialist to speak with you. However, please understand that they will not be able to provide specific details about my case due to confidentiality. For more comprehensive information about the donation process and the time commitment required, you can visit nmdp.org.

Recovery and physical limitations

Q: How soon will you be able to return to class after donation?

- Recovery times for marrow and PBSC procedures differ, so the time it takes to return to normal activities will depend on the type of donation.
- **If I donate PBSC**, I should be able to return to class, work and any normal activities within one to two days. The median time to full recovery is one week.
- **If I donate marrow**, I should be able to return to class, work and any normal activities within one to seven days. It's recommended that I plan to take a few days off from school and work, especially if my activities are physically demanding. The median time to full recovery for a marrow donation is 20 days.

Q: What is the recovery timeline?

- **If I donate PBSC**, recovery times can vary, but I should be able to return to school, work and other activities within one to seven days.
- **If I donate marrow**, I may experience some pain and will be less active for the first two weeks following donation. While recovery times vary, most side effects typically go away after one to three weeks.

About NMDP

Q: How can you be sure that NMDP is a legitimate organization?

- Founded in 1987, NMDP is a leader in cell therapy, helping find cures and save lives for patients with blood cancers and disorders.
- The U.S. Congress has entrusted NMDP to operate the C.W. Bill Young Cell Transplantation Program, the federal program supporting the national blood and marrow registry of the United States.
- NMDP serves as the hub of a global transplant network. The organization's standards are designed to ensure that both patients and donors receive high-quality care and that all government requirements are met.

Conversation tip: Share [this video](#) with your instructors to show them how you're now making dreams possible.

Q: NMDP sounds great! How can our school and students get involved?

- There are many ways our school and students can get involved:
 - **NMDP Chapters:** [Join a nationwide grassroots effort](#) of students around the country working to raise funds, educate others and build the NMDP Registry on campus. Chapter participation helps build leadership skills and enhances resumes.
 - **Host a donor recruitment drive:** [Learn ways to volunteer](#) and how to schedule a donor recruitment drive.
 - **Spread awareness:** Encourage students to join the movement and share the NMDP mission through their social networks.
 - **Share my story:** Help tell my donation story to students and the campus community through our school newspaper and other communication channels.

Additional donor resources

- Visit nmdp.org/DonorToolkit and click on “Talking with educators” for more resources.
- Contact your donor specialist if there’s a specific resource you’re unable to find.