

## Doctors urged to discuss cord blood donations early in pregnancy

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(HealthDay)—A leading group of U.S. pediatricians is encouraging

parents to donate to public cord blood banks after the birth of their children.

The past decade has seen an increase in the use of [umbilical cord blood](#) for [stem cell transplants](#) that can save children with fatal or debilitating diseases, the American Academy of Pediatrics says in a new policy statement.

"Most parents will never need cord blood for their own family's use, but they can donate this precious lifesaving gift to benefit others," said statement lead author Dr. William Shearer. He is a professor of pediatrics and immunology at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

"We expect the need for these therapies that rely on stem cell transplantation to grow, and would like families to understand the choices they have," he said in an academy news release.

Cord blood is an excellent source of [stem cells](#). It's taken from the placenta of healthy newborns and used most often in stem cell transplantations to treat fatal diseases such as cancer, blood disorders and immune deficiencies, the doctors' group says.

Donating cord blood is safe for the baby and doesn't interfere with labor and delivery, according to the statement.

By 2013, more than 30,000 stem cell transplants had been performed worldwide using cord blood.

Parents must register in advance to donate cord blood so that a collection kit can be sent for use after the baby's delivery. Because of this, doctors should talk with expectant parents about a donation during an early prenatal visit, the AAP says.

"The research is evolving in this area, which is exciting news for patients whose lives may someday depend on a donation of cord blood," Shearer said. "The hope is that more doctors will discuss the options with expectant [parents](#) well in advance of their baby's birth, so they understand the tremendous potential to help others in medical need."

The statement authors also distinguish between public cord blood banks, which match individuals in need worldwide, and private ones.

Private cord blood banks store cord blood for a donor family's own use, if needed, "although there is little evidence supporting this use unless a family shares a known genetic defect," the statement says.

Also, while there's no charge for donating to a public cord [blood](#) bank, private operations charge an initial fee of \$1,350 to \$2,300. The private banks' yearly maintenance charges range from \$100 to \$175.

The statement was published online Oct. 30 in the journal *Pediatrics*.

**More information:** The National Marrow Donor Program has more on [cord blood](#).

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