

# Resources for cord-blood donations available but limited

By [Tammie Smith](#) Published: February 27, 2010

Resources limited for cord-blood donations

Q: Three and a half years ago when I had my son, I was able to donate umbilical cord blood to a public cord-blood bank. I want to donate cord blood again but am being told that there are no resources to accept my donation. I am determined that my new baby's cord blood not go to waste. Answer: Umbilical cord blood is a rich source of stem cells. Stem cells have the potential to become many other types of cells in the body, so they can be useful in treating diseases.

Some parents opt to save their newborn's umbilical cord blood in a private cord-blood bank for family use if ever needed. The National Marrow Donor Program maintains a national searchable registry of donations made to a network of public cord-blood banks.

The public bank makes stem cells available to match unrelated people undergoing treatment for such diseases as leukemia or lymphoma.

"There are many people searching for a blood or marrow-matched cell source," said Michael Boo of the National Marrow Donor Program, based in Minneapolis. "Cord blood helps us meet the needs of those who cannot find an adult donor. This is particularly an issue with people in the minority community, where they are less likely to find an adult donor match."

Boo said the federal government has made about \$12 million available this year for public cord-blood donations.

Ann Lawrence Grasty of Orange, due to give birth in mid-March, wants to make a public donation. Grasty said she has had friends who have had life-threatening diseases.

"Using their own blood was not an option. That is what was making them sick," she said.

The National Marrow Donor Program works with 27 public cord-blood banks across the country. Those banks have about 160,000 cord-blood units. As of last year, 3,000 matches had been made for lifesaving treatments, the program's Web site notes.

In Virginia, Inova Fairfax Hospital is the only facility listed in the network. Because she is not delivering there, Grasty looked at the other option -- which was to contact a private firm that also accepts cord-blood donations for the National Marrow Donor Program's public registry.

The firm, Cryobanks International, provides donation kits for pregnant women who make arrangements with their obstetrician, hospital or midwife to collect the umbilical cord blood.

"We are a privately funded company, and we therefore have to set a limit as to how many we can handle a month," said Dr. John Edwards of Cryobanks, based in Florida. "It is wonderful more women are volunteering and are now being better educated and willing to educate."

Grasty said she offered to buy a kit herself. Boo explained that the cost of the kits is minimal compared with the costs to process and store the donation, which can be \$1,500 to \$2,000, plus there are regulatory restrictions.

Boo said some states are making funds available for public cord banking. Virginia legislators in 2006 created the Virginia Cord Blood Bank Initiative. A modest amount was included in the general-fund budget to start a public cord-blood bank. But just weeks away from having the framework in place, the funds were cut.

This session, legislators are moving to raise awareness of cord-blood donations with a bill that requires the state health department to post information on cord-blood banking on its Web site. Both efforts were introduced by Del. Robert G. Marshall, R-Prince William.