**Frequently Asked Questions**

What kind of program is this?

Our official name is C.W. Bill Young Department of Defense (DoD) Marrow Donor Recruitment and Research Program, but we are also called Salute to Life. We work exclusively with military personnel and their dependents, DoD civilian employees, Reservists, and Coast Guard and National Guard members to facilitate marrow and stem cell donations. Our program was established by Public Law 101-302 in 1990, and operates from Rockville, Maryland.

Can anyone join the registry through this program?

No. To join through our donor center, prospective donors must be:

* A member of the U.S. military, Reserve, Coast Guard, National Guard; military dependent; or DoD civilian employee
* Between the ages of 18 and 60
* In general good health – For example, we cannot accept donors with HIV, heart disease, autoimmune disorders, hepatitis B or C, kidney or liver disease, or bleeding disorders

If you are not affiliated with the Department of Defense, you may register through [www.bethematch.org](http://www.bethematch.org). If you do not meet the age or health qualifications, there are still other ways to help.

Why do you recruit only military donors?

Our organization is the only one authorized to work with U.S. military and DoD-affiliated donors – but we partner with the National Marrow Donor Program ([www.bethematch.org](http://www.bethematch.org)), which recruits and assists civilian donors. We use many of the same processes and technologies. However, our organization is uniquely suited to address the practical needs of active-duty donors.

Do I become part of a military-only registry?

No. While only military, military dependent, and DoD civilian employees may join through our organization – these individuals become registered as part of the national registry. The national registry is open to both civilian and military patients in need of a transplant.

I was told that I could not donate blood – does this mean I cannot donate marrow?

It depends. Certain factors that prevent you from donating blood – such as living in Great Britain or taking malaria medication or having a recent tattoo – do not preclude you from becoming a bone marrow donor. Other factors – such as positive HIV status or bleeding disorder – may keep you from donating marrow or stem cells. If you are in general good health and wish to participate, then complete the registration form. Donor Center staff can help determine whether or not you qualify.

Are there other ways to help?

Yes. There are number of ways that you can help people in need. Raise awareness – many people know very little about marrow and stem cell donation. Participate in a registration drive or open a walk-in site. We can send you all of the materials you need to hold an event on your own base, camp, fort, or installation. If interested, please contact [recruiting@dodmarrow.org](mailto:recruiting@dodmarrow.org).

How do I register?

Registration is very easy and takes about 10 minutes. You will need to complete a consent form and swab your cheek. Kits are available through scheduled drives, walk-in clinics, or may be requested by mail through our website, [www.salutetolife.org](http://www.salutetolife.org). Completed kits are returned to the Donor Center for processing.

Do I need to re-register? Should I register again now that I am in the military?

There is no need. Once you have joined the national registry, you are a part of it until you turn 61 years old or ask to be removed. There is only one national registry. Joining multiple times actually creates problems rather than solves them. If you joined the registry before joining the military, your hometown Donor Center will forward your information to our center should you be called as a potential match for a patient in need. If you are contacted by a civilian Donor Center, be sure to inform them that you are a member of the military.

I joined the registry while in the military, but I’m no longer in the service. How do I transfer out?

You do not need to transfer out of this Donor Center. We are proud to serve not only active military members, but also Reservists, inactive, separated, and retired military members.

Will I donate right away?

No, for several reasons. It takes time to have your sample shipped, typed (your Human Leukocyte Antigen, or HLA, pattern is determined), and added to the national registry. Once on the registry, you may be contacted as a match for one patient, multiple patients, or no one at all. It is impossible for us to estimate your chances of being matched, but the vast majority of registrants are never contacted. Please do not be disappointed. Just being a part of the registry offers hope to patients and their families.

Will I ever hear from you again?

Yes. Technology now allows us more interactivity than we could once imagine. We have begun reaching out to our potential donors through periodic email and text messages, Facebook, and our website. If you registered as a donor through our organization prior to 2015 and wish to opt-in to courtesy messaging, please email [donors@dodmarrow.org](mailto:donors@dodmarrow.org). We hope that you will also stay in touch with us, updating your contact information as you change homes and jobs.

What is involved in donating?

Once you have been called as a match, there are several steps to take prior to donation. First, you will complete a health history questionnaire and provide a blood sample. If this initial evaluation is promising, then you will be given a thorough physical examination. Once you are certified as healthy to donate, then you may provide stem cells through one of two methods:

1. Traditional bone marrow donation – A small portion of the marrow (the soft center of the bone that makes blood cells) is removed from the donor’s hip using a needle. The procedure is done in a hospital setting and the donor is given general anesthesia.
2. Peripheral blood stem cell donation – For five days, the donor receives a drug that causes the bones to release stem cells into the blood stream. On the 5th days, these extra cells are then gathered using a special blood filtering machine called an apheresis machine.

How uncomfortable is it to donate?

The level of discomfort depends upon the person and the type of donation (marrow vs. PBSC). Marrow donors tend to experience hip and back pain and fatigue. PBSC donors tend to experience headaches, bone and muscle aches, sleep disruption, and fatigue. But not everyone has the same symptoms – and some people are more or less bothered by them. No matter the type of donation, most donors report a return to full health within a few weeks.

Why is my contact information so important?

If we need to contact you because you are a potential match for a patient, time is of the essence. With out-dated contact information, we waste precious time trying to locate your new address or phone number. We ask that you list not just your own contact information, but contact information for a family member or friend who might be able to reach you in the years to come. As you move or change phone numbers, please update your contact information through our Donor Center so that we can quickly and accurately locate you when need. Contact information can be updated online ([www.salutetolife.org](http://www.salutetolife.org)) or by phone at 1-800-MARROW-3.

How do I update my contact information?

Contact information can be updated online ([www.salutetolife.org](http://www.salutetolife.org)) or by phone at 1-800-MARROW-3.

I only want to donate to my sister/husband/friend. Can I do that?

Yes, but not through our Donor Center. When you join the national registry, you are enrolling as a potential bone marrow donor for any well-matched patient – not just a family member or friend. To be typed for a particular person only, you will need to coordinate your testing through that patient’s medical team.

Is there an international registry?

Our national registry participates cooperatively with more than 50 other nations to address the need of all citizens. A best match may be found in the U.S., but it might also be in Germany, Israel, or Japan. Marrow and stem cells might be sent to – or from – a number of different locations around the world, depending on the patient’s need. Currently, about half of all donations involve an international donor or recipient. This cooperation has increased the pool of potential donors to more than 33 million.

Why do you need my Social Security Number?

We request that donors list their Social Security Number (SSN) as part of the registration process. This piece of information can be critical when trying to quickly locate a donor years after they joined the Registry. Many of our donors are highly mobile individuals – moving frequently and changing contact information on a regular basis. Donors may leave the military, change names as they change marital status, even change genders. But your SSN never changes and it can be used to identify your residence and contact information.

What is a donor identification number?

Numbers assigned to donors’ samples when they arrive at the laboratory. These unique identifiers allow you to be registered into the national database without having to release your name or other identifying information. Your identifying number will be assigned when your sample has been typed, which may be as long as two months after you’ve been swabbed.

Who pays for all of this?

Not the donor. Our donors do not have to pay for HLA-typing, travel costs, medical costs, or any other donation-related expenses. Depending on the type of expense, these are covered either by our organization or Be The Match (another name for the National Marrow Donor Program). In the end, however, it is our goal to keep the cost of donation low so that we can help as many individuals as possible. This is why we do not offer first-class airline tickets or other luxury options to donors.