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Every unit has a story: SANBS documentary reveals why blood matters as stocks drop to 4.2 days' cover

Johannesburg, 9 October 2026 – What happens to a unit of blood after someone rolls up their sleeve and donates? Who receives it? What does that blood mean to a person fighting for their life? And what would happen if the blood needed in an emergency simply wasn't available?

These are some of the questions explored in the South African National Blood Service's (SANBS) new documentary, *Why Blood Matters*, which premiered in Johannesburg on Thursday, 8 October, and will be broadcast on SABC 2 on Sunday, 11 October 2026, at 9pm.

The premiere brought together the people whose stories bring the documentary to life, highlighting the profound impact of blood donation and the people, science and processes that make safe blood available to patients across South Africa.

The screening comes at a critical time for the country's blood supply, with SANBS blood stocks having dropped to 4.2 days' cover. SANBS is urging eligible donors to donate blood as soon as possible to help replenish stocks and ensure that blood is available for patients who need it.

South Africans are encouraged to watch *Why Blood Matters* on Sunday and, just as importantly, donate blood. Behind every unit is a patient who may be relying on the generosity of a stranger.

[Watch the documentary trailer](#)

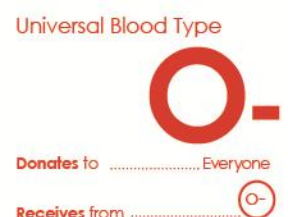
Every unit has a human story

The documentary takes viewers behind the scenes of South Africa's blood supply system, bringing together the voices of donors, recipients, healthcare professionals and SANBS experts to tell the story of what happens between the moment blood is donated and the moment it becomes a lifeline for someone in need.

At the heart of the documentary are the people whose lives have been touched by blood donation. For some recipients, blood is needed because of an accident or medical emergency. For others, it forms part of a long and complex treatment journey.

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One of the stories featured is that of Marie Bontjes, who was diagnosed with anaemia at just one year old. Her story highlights how blood transfusion can become part of a person's life from childhood, and the difference a readily available blood supply can make.

Another recipient, Meena Singh, experienced liver failure and required a liver transplant. Her journey involved receiving multiple units of blood – an intervention she describes as giving her an opportunity at life.

The documentary also follows Gregory Naidoo, whose experience illustrates the unpredictability of medical emergencies and the vital role blood can play when a person's body is under immense strain.

For donors, the motivation can be equally personal.

Mario Ferreira, who has been donating blood since he was 19, speaks about the deeply personal reward of knowing that his donation could help save another person's life.

"Knowing that I can save a life makes me happy."

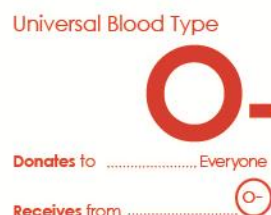
Another donor featured in the documentary is Boitumelo Masiu, who began donating while still at school. Her experience demonstrates how a culture of blood donation can begin early and become a lifelong commitment.

For Siyabonga Malinga, donating blood has become part of a community of people who understand that, in an emergency, there may be no time to wait.

More than blood: understanding what happens behind the scenes. While the documentary centres on personal stories, it also seeks to answer questions and address misconceptions surrounding the blood supply system.

Blood donation is voluntary, and donated blood is given freely. However, once blood has been donated, it must undergo a rigorous process that includes testing, processing, storage and distribution before it can safely reach a patient.

This requires specialised infrastructure, equipment, skilled people and logistics – all of which form part of the complex system needed to ensure safe blood is available when and where it is required. With SANBS aiming to collect approximately 3 500 units of blood every day, the scale of the operation is significant.



However, maintaining an adequate blood supply depends on the continued commitment of donors. Blood has a limited shelf life, with red blood cells lasting up to 42 days, making regular donations essential to keeping stocks replenished.

For SANBS, this is ultimately about much more than numbers. It is about ensuring that patients undergoing emergency treatment, surgery, cancer care, transplants and other medical procedures have access to the blood they need.

Simphiwe Cele, Marketing and Branding Manager at SANBS, says the documentary provides an opportunity for South Africans to see the full human impact of blood donation.

“We often talk about blood in terms of units, blood groups, stock levels and statistics, but behind every unit is a human story. A donor chose to give, people work tirelessly to ensure the blood is safe, and a patient's life may depend on receiving it. *Why Blood Matters* brings those stories together and reminds us why this work matters so deeply.”

He adds that one of the most important messages for viewers is that blood cannot simply be replaced when it is needed.

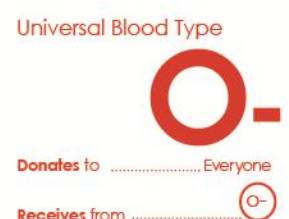
“Nothing does what blood does. It cannot be manufactured, and it cannot be taken for granted. The only reason we can provide blood to patients when they need it is because ordinary South Africans make the extraordinary decision to donate.”

The documentary also highlights the science, infrastructure and people behind South Africa's blood supply, including the extensive processes involved in ensuring that every unit collected can be safely used.

Watch on Sunday. Donate today.

For SANBS, *Why Blood Matters* is more than a documentary. It is an invitation to South Africans to understand their role in a system that touches thousands of lives – and to recognise that the decision to donate blood can make the difference between a patient receiving the treatment they need and a critical shortage standing in the way.

With blood stocks currently at only 4.2 days' cover, the need for donations is urgent. SANBS is calling on eligible donors to visit their nearest donor centre or mobile blood drive and donate as soon as possible.



South Africans are also encouraged to tune in to *Why Blood Matters* on SABC 2 on Sunday, 11 October 2026, at 9pm to discover the stories, science and people behind one of the country's most essential healthcare services.

A single donation can help support emergency treatment, surgery, cancer care, transplant journeys and ongoing medical treatment. The donor and recipient may never meet, but their lives are connected through an act of generosity that can give someone another chance.

For more information or to find your nearest donor centre or mobile blood drive, contact SANBS on 0800 11 90 31 or visit [SANBS](https://www.sanbs.org.za).

Be the Lifeline. Donate today.

Stay connected with SANBS on social media:

- X (@theSANBS),
- Facebook (@SANBS),
- Instagram (@thesanbs),
- TikTok (@thesanbs).

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ABOUT SANBS

The South African National Blood Service (SANBS) is an independent non-profit organisation and a leader in blood transfusion. SANBS operates in eight of the nine provinces in South Africa (excluding the Western Cape, which is served by the Western Cape Blood Service) and provides crucial support to countries in the SADC region.

The organisation prides itself on being the lifeblood of South Africa's healthcare system, providing over one million world-class blood products annually. This pedigree comes from world-class testing and collection protocols, ensuring a safe supply for patients. SANBS operates a vast network of donor centres, including more than 60 fixed centres and over 100 mobile collection sites daily.

SANBS aims to collect 3,500 units of blood daily to ensure a safe and sufficient supply for South Africa's healthcare system. Regular donations are critical because a unit of blood lasts only 42 days. We encourage donors to commit to giving blood regularly, ensuring a continuous supply for those in need.

[sanbs.org.za](https://www.sanbs.org.za)
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