

Canine Mobile Blood Bank

Pets helping pets when emergencies strike

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There are many ways people can help animals, but did you know your dog can volunteer in a charitable mission too? Often overlooked is the need for animal blood donations, a vital resource when it comes to medical emergencies. From surgeries to traumas, autoimmune diseases, and acute blood loss, the need for blood never goes away. Donating is simpler than one may think, especially when we have a mobile blood bank that visits our county quarterly.

Penn Animal Bloodmobile

In the early 90s, the University of Pennsylvania's Animal Blood Bank introduced its first mobile donation clinic. "We realized our facility is not the easiest to get to and can be quite a travel for people who would otherwise be interested in their dog donating blood, so we started a mobile clinic," Kym Marryott, head nurse of Penn Animal Blood Bank said. "We travel to locations in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, so long as they are within a two-hour window from our facility since we only have 6-8 hours to get the blood into proper storage."

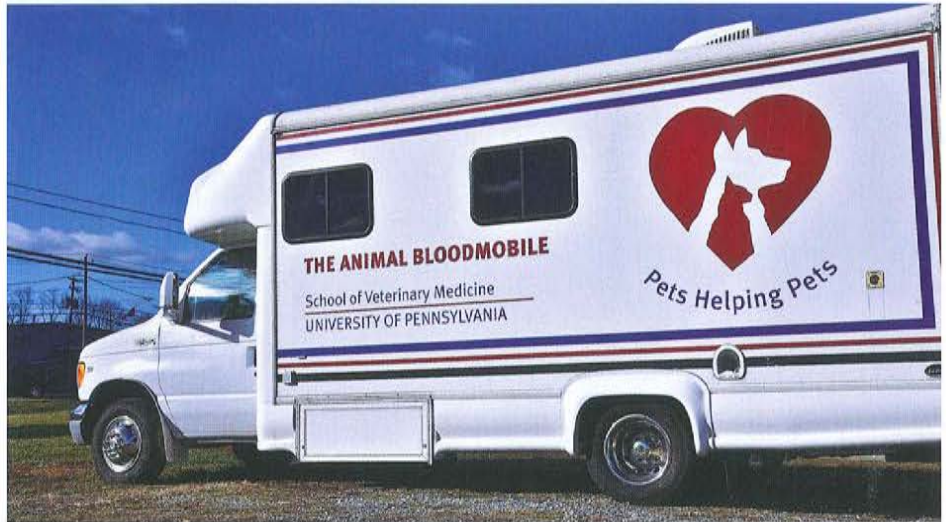
These donations go toward life saving medical treatments. "We use just about everything we collect, and we collect around 25 units of blood a month," Kym said. Those units can translate to 75 animals helped as each donation can assist up to 3 critically ill animals.

The Penn Animal Bloodmobile is the first and only traveling blood donation service for animals in the nation as far as Kym is aware. They travel about once a week to selected areas where they visit for several hours. Every January, April, July, and October, KPETS hosts the Bloodmobile at That Fish Place - That Pet Place so Lancaster area dogs can take part.

Donation Process

Around 150-200 donors are currently in the program, though the need for more is never ending. Only around 20% of dogs who receive screening have the correct universal blood type and can donate. To be considered, an animal must weigh at least 55 pounds, be between the ages of one and six years old, be in excellent health and up to date on vaccines, and be without medication use other than flea, tick and heartworm preventatives. The Bloodmobile has been coming to Lancaster for three years now and still doesn't have the desired 12 regular donors due to these factors.

"It's an ongoing process to find the right dogs for the program," Kym said. "In addition to these guidelines, we never force an animal to make donations. They have



to be a compliant patient since we do not use sedation or muzzles. These qualifications make it even trickier to find donors, but their comfort comes first."

The process is straightforward. You must pre-register, and when you arrive a nurse will perform a brief exam and go over your dog's health history. Following this is an initial blood screening that will determine your pet's blood type and hemoglobin level. If your pet is the right type and is not anemic, they will give a donation that takes roughly 3-4 minutes. Approved donors should donate at least 3 times a year. "Animals do not have the same anxiety and anticipation we do when we donate blood," Kym explained. "They don't pass out and get dizzy like we do, either." All donations end with a tasty treat and a sticker signifying the pup donated. "We have never encountered any complications since we will only take blood from healthy animals," Kym said. A restful day following the procedure is recommended.

The Benefits of Donating

"A lot of people do not realize how important blood donations are in animals," Kym explained. "But they are just as needed as they are with people. I think one of the main reasons people enjoy having their animal participate is they realize they are helping another pet and its family in a situation they could face someday. Medical emergencies are never something we want to deal with, but they happen.

When blood is available, these situations are a little less stressful since we can immediately start care for the animal."

The benefits of donating go beyond helping animals in need. Every qualified donor receives a full blood panel workup and, once your dog donates, they are qualified to receive free units of blood equal to the amount they have donated should they ever need a transfusion. They also go home with a bag of food as a thank you.

If you think your pet may be an eligible candidate and you want to support pet families facing emergency medical situations, consider making your dog a supporter for dogs in need. You can learn more about local donations by visiting kpets.org/penn-vet-canine-blood-bank

WHAT ABOUT CATS?

Due to cats' less tolerable dispositions, they are not so easy to collect from on the go. Cat donors are all in-house donors who are adopted from Penn's local SPCA. These are spoiled cats who live like kings in a cat colony that is frequently visited by University of Pennsylvania veterinary students. The cats donate blood as often as any other donor and are adopted into forever homes after a couple of years of service.