**Subject: Study Suggests New COVID-19 Timeline in the U.S.**

**The following message is from Dr. Susan Stramer, vice president, Scientific Affairs:**

Throughout this pandemic, blood donations have been and will be essential to maintaining the health of communities and to help researchers identify, track and better understand this novel virus. While the Red Cross has focused on sharing the need for blood donations with the public, behind the scenes, Scientific Affairs has been highly engaged in several research efforts concerning COVID-19.

Data from U.S. blood donation screening have historically been used to help monitor the emergence of infectious disease agents, most recently Zika virus and now this novel coronavirus. Today, a study conducted in partnership between the American Red Cross and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) was published in the *Clinical Infectious Diseases* journal. This study aimed at helping determine when the virus might have first entered the U.S. by using archived samples from routine blood donations collected by Red Cross from donors in nine states between Dec. 13, 2019 and Jan. 17, 2020. The results showed that it’s possible that SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) may have been present in the U.S. in December 2019, earlier than previously recognized.

As many know, in the United States, the first COVID-19 infection was reported on Jan. 19, 2020 in a returned traveler from China. The findings of this study indicate that the virus that causes COVID-19 may have been present in California, Oregon, and Washington as early as Dec. 13-16, 2019, and in Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin as early as Dec. 30 - Jan. 17, 2019. Although researchers at the CDC found antibodies that reacted to the virus in blood donations from all nine states that were part of this study, the percentage of blood samples with these antibodies was very low, indicating the virus was not widespread. The Red Cross removed all identifiable donor information from the blood donation samples provided to the CDC for testing.

The tests used in this evaluation were designed to look for antibodies to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, rather than antibodies to other types of coronaviruses. However, there is some limited similarity between SARS-CoV-2 and other, more common coronaviruses, so cross reactivity cannot be completely ruled out.

To read the published study on the *Clinical Infectious Diseases* journal visit their [website](https://academic.oup.com/cid/advance-article/doi/10.1093/cid/ciaa1785/6012472).

As an organization, we are grateful to be able to contribute to the nation’s ongoing public health response. Thank you.