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Highland Rescue Team Joins Regional "Chain of Care" with Clear Creek EMS in Launch of Pre-Hospital Whole Blood Program

As residents and visitors travel through the mountains this holiday season, Highland Rescue Team (HRTAD) and Clear Creek EMS (CCEMS) are unwrapping a critical gift for the community: expanded access to lifesaving whole blood and a new, more sustainable model for emergency care.

Beginning today, Highland Rescue Team—in collaboration Foothills Regional Emergency Medical & Trauma Advisory Council (RETAC) and the Colorado Whole Blood Coalition—is officially launching its Whole Blood Program, joining fellow agencies, including Clear Creek EMS. This launch marks a major milestone for the region as these agencies become the first ambulance services in Colorado to utilize a 35-day Low Titer O Whole Blood (LTOWB). Supplied by South Texas Blood & Tissue, this offers a significant advancement over the previous 21-day expiration cycle.

This initiative allows HRTAD paramedics to perform on-scene blood transfusions for patients in traumatic or medical shock. For the residents of Genesee, Idledale, and Lookout Mountain, as well as the thousands of travelers on Interstate 70, this represents a significant leap in the standard of emergency medical care. With this launch, Highland Rescue Team becomes one of the only primarily-volunteer EMS agencies in the United States to carry and transfuse whole blood.

“Improving our abilities to care for the District’s residents and visitors is our top priority,” said Highland Rescue Team Chief Bob Fager. “Our EMS providers will be able to use this new tool to create better outcomes for our patients and save lives that could not otherwise have been saved.”

Initially funded with a grant from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration’s (NHTSA) Road to Zero Program, this program is not only life-saving, but sustainable. The transition to a 35-day product will almost certainly make a favorable impact in the program’s sustainability by minimizing the waste of blood products due to expiration and reducing the overall cost of the initiative. While this is a first for Colorado, this specific model has already

demonstrated great success in San Antonio, Texas, proving that longer shelf lives can effectively support high-stakes emergency medical systems.

This expansion comes just over one year after the initial launch of the Clear Creek and Grand County pilot programs. Those original programs represented the second and third whole blood initiatives in the state and were the very first to successfully place whole blood in rural Colorado areas. Today's announcement strengthens that legacy as Highland Rescue receives its first unit and Clear Creek EMS expands its existing capabilities by adding a second unit of whole blood to its fleet.

With no hospital in the county, Clear Creek EMS knows this extra unit of blood will save even more people on the long ride to the hospital.

"Almost everyone who needs a transfusion in the field will eventually need more at the hospital," Clear Creek EMS Director Aaron Crawley said. "Providing that first unit on the scene bolsters the entire medical resource chain. In terms of pre-hospital trauma care, this is the most meaningful resource we have seen in decades, and now we can do even more."

The science behind the program is clear. National data from the NHTSA shows that 43 percent of motor-vehicle crash victims were still alive when first responders arrived. Because blood loss is the leading preventable cause of death in trauma, early transfusion can reduce mortality by 37 percent.

"This places Highland Rescue Team, Clear Creek EMS, and all the other agencies in the Colorado Whole Blood Coalition at the forefront of the most important advancements in pre-hospital emergency care ever. Pre-hospital blood administration is a safe, effective, and critical intervention for patients with life-threatening bleeds," St. Anthony Hospital's Dr. Scott Branney added.

The Whole Blood program continues to rely on the generosity of donors. While South Texas Blood & Tissue provides this specialized 35-day product, Vitalant remains the primary provider for the majority of Colorado's hospitals and a key supporter of the Coalition's efforts. Those able to donate are encouraged to visit vitalant.org to help support these lifesaving programs and give the gift of life this holiday season.

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