

 **Canada's Lifeline:** Our frontline



I want to help people get better.

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Robyn,
Canadian Blood Services
Technical specialist in Regina, Sask.



During the COVID-19 pandemic, we're bringing you stories of our employees who continue to work on the front lines. Robyn Johnson is a technical specialist in Regina, Sask.

My job is really about solving puzzles. I use my expertise to help find red blood cells for patients with a rare blood type, or who need platelets that are a precise match. I'm also on daily calls where we decide how to move blood products around the country, to ensure we meet the needs of hospitals here in Saskatchewan. I'm very much a puzzle person, and I just love figuring out all the pieces and having it come together perfectly.

I became a medical laboratory technologist because I wanted to help people get better. One patient who has stuck with me is a woman here in Saskatchewan with a rare blood type. I had to work with colleagues in donor testing to find a match for her. We were able to identify just two suitable donors in Canada, one in Vancouver and one in Toronto. They came in to donate regularly so she could get the blood she needed every couple of months.

In my role I don't have direct contact with patients but it is nice to hear stories. Recently, my supervisor shared a letter from a doctor in B.C. with me and my colleagues. He was treating a four-year-old girl with sickle cell disease who required red blood cells of a rare type. He was so thankful Canadian Blood Services had come through for her. It's awesome to hear stories like that. It really warms your heart.

'We have a pretty incredible crew of people here'

We have a pretty incredible crew of people here to deliver for patients during the pandemic. It's an effort to stay physically distant because we do need to collaborate, and we've also been training a new employee. When I'm in my office it's easier with the stop sign outside to remind people!

Where I see the biggest impact of COVID-19 is moving blood products across the country. Those shipments are routine, but right now we need to plan especially carefully because there are fewer cargo flights.

'At home we're just trying to manage'

I have three children and the oldest is six. It's difficult because my husband is still working as an air traffic specialist and we don't have any family in Saskatchewan. We've rearranged our shifts so one of us can be home with the kids while the other works. So at home we're just trying to manage with what we have. We do a lot of yoga as a family and try to stay active.

About a month ago we started fostering a dog. We go for a walk every night after dinner and teach the new puppy how to walk on a leash. My kids are each taking turns at that. He's brought a lot of love into our home, and it's taught the kids a lot more than I could teach them with schoolwork.