



A COVID-19 survivor's life-saving donation

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“It would be great to help,” she said. “But will it hurt?”

These were the two thoughts that crossed 28 year-old Allison Seaburg’s mind when she heard about a potentially life-saving clinical trial that could change the way our health care system cares for COVID-19 patients.

The trial relies on donated plasma from people like Allison: healthy individuals who have already recovered from the virus.

‘It hit me hard’

In early March, Allison returned from vacation in Austria and was showing telltale signs of COVID-19 – fever, chills and inability to take deep breaths.

After ruling out flu, care teams at Park Nicollet administered a COVID-19 test, which confirmed Allison’s infection. She was among Minnesota’s earliest diagnosed patients.

“It hit me hard,” Allison said. “My family and friends were worried. Someone texted me, ‘are you going to live,’ and that’s when I got nervous.”

But, after a week of bed rest, the marathon runner slowly started to feel like her normal self, confident that one day soon she’d be back to her daily workouts.

Not just anybody's antibodies

After two weeks, Allison's symptoms were nearly all gone. That's when her dad, a hospitalist at Methodist Hospital, told her about the new clinical trial available to HealthPartners patients.

It's called *Expanded Access to Convalescent Plasma for the Treatment of Patients with COVID-19*. In collaboration with Mayo Clinic, the American Red Cross and others, our clinician researchers infuse plasma donated from recovered COVID patients into other COVID patients who are still severely ill and hospitalized.

"The hope is that by using plasma from COVID survivors, as opposed to people who've never been infected, we're also transferring antibodies," said Cristina Baker, MD, department chair of infectious disease at Park Nicollet who co-leads the trial with Omobosola Akinsete, MD, within the HealthPartners system. "These antibodies should know how to identify and destroy the novel coronavirus in the recipient, leading to a faster recovery. This approach has been tried with other coronaviruses such as SARS and MERS."

The donation: Simple, rewarding – and painless

Allison enrolled in the trial. The donation process was very similar to giving blood. It took 2.5 hours and came with no side effects, save for a little fatigue and small bruise where the needle entered her vein.

Since donating, she received a message from the Red Cross saying that her plasma was used, possibly giving a second chance at life to someone who had been struggling to overcome COVID-19.

"When I got that email, I said, 'wow this is really cool. Maybe I did help somebody,'" Allison said. "It was surreal. At a time when people are isolated, it was a moment of powerful human connection.

"It doesn't take much to possibly save someone's life," she added. "And it doesn't hurt!"

Pictured above: Allison and her dad, Mark Seaburg, a hospitalist at Methodist Hospital.



Allison during her plasma donation.