

Eagle County Paramedic Services's whole blood program is saving lives in Eagle County

EDWARDS, Colo.-- In Oct. 2025, Eagle County Paramedic Services (ECPS) launched a cutting-edge whole blood transfusion program in partnership with Denver Health and the American Red Cross, marking a pivotal advancement in trauma care for Eagle County and setting a precedent for rural and resort communities across America. Now, the agency's supervisors are carrying whole blood making critical, potentially life-saving intervention possible before patients reach a hospital.

"Minutes matter in trauma," explains Dr. Jason Zeller, ECPS EMS Physician - Medical Director. "Whole blood is by far superior to any other resuscitation fluid available. There is a clear benefit with very little risk when given to the right patient at the right time. Benefits are elevated the earlier you do it and every minute counts."

Eagle County's unique geography can mean extended response and transport times, depending on where an accident happens. Covering more than 1600 square miles of terrain, much of it remote and mountainous, ECPS's partnership with the American Red Cross and Denver Health ensures a safe and steady blood supply, using the safest available whole blood and minimizing waste. If ECPS paramedics don't use the blood in seven days, it is returned to Denver Health and utilized in the hospital, ensuring all supplies are utilized. In the first few months of having whole blood, ECPS utilized it more than five times.

Severe bleeding is the leading preventable cause of death after trauma, especially in regions like Eagle County, where distance and terrain can complicate a quick trip to the closest hospital. ECPS paramedics can now deliver all the vital components—red blood cells, plasma and platelets—in a single transfusion, just as military teams do for front-line casualties.

Incorporating whole blood in the field raises the bar for emergency medicine. It's much more effective than saline or separated blood parts for helping people with severe injuries: It keeps the body's natural clotting ability intact and greatly improves the chances of survival. Whole blood administration in the field has shown to be three times more effective at saving lives than CPR or AEDs, with up to a four-fold improvement in survival rates when given within 35 minutes of injury.

According to the American College of Surgeons, more than 10,000 trauma deaths per year could be avoided with timely access to blood transfusions. Studies suggest that providing transfusions in the field can improve outcomes, particularly in rural areas with longer transport times. The Colorado Springs Fire Department established Colorado's first whole blood transfusion program in 2024; according to Dr. Matt Angelidis, medical director of UHealth Emergency Medical Services, in its first 100 days, the program saved more than 30 lives and continues to save a life approximately every 72 hours.

With few rural agencies in Colorado currently employing whole blood in the prehospital setting, ECPS's initiative is a model of national significance.

“We’re bringing trauma center care to the mountain,” said Chris Carr, an ECPS critical care paramedic who spearheaded this program. “Whether someone is injured on Vail Mountain, a remote ranch or the interstate, our team can start the clock on recovery without waiting for hospital doors to open.”

ECPS’s whole blood program is specifically designed for patients suffering hemorrhagic shock; immediate roadside transfusions have proven to reduce hospital stays and time in the intensive care unit.

“It’s not just saving lives—it’s setting a new standard,” said Eagle County Paramedic Services CEO Brandon Daruna, “We’re proud to bring whole blood to the people of, and visitors to, our community.”

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About Eagle County Paramedic Services

Eagle County Paramedic Services (ECPS) operates ambulances using five stations from Gypsum to Vail, Colorado, with up to 14 ambulances providing 24-7, 365-day coverage. Last year, Eagle County Paramedic Services answered more than 6000 calls. ECPS provides world-class out-of-hospital care for people having medical emergencies, conducts community health services, responds to wildland fires, provides search and rescue paramedicine and also conducts education and training programs. For more information about the district, visit eaglecountyparamedics.com or call 970-926-5270.