

Cord blood donation helps boy with immune system disease

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He has no bone marrow match, but a donation of umbilical cord blood has brightened the future of Zachary Pietrzykowski. The 6-year-old Holland boy was diagnosed with an immune system deficiency called chronic granulomatous disease.

Zachary, whose white blood cells can't fight off bacterial or fungal infections, needs a donation of bone marrow or adult stem cells in order to grow healthy white blood cells. In order to help find a donor, the West Michigan Community Blood Center sponsored donor registration drives Feb. 16 in Holland, Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo. Almost 140 donors -- 91 from Holland -- paid \$25 apiece to give blood samples and be put on the donor registry.

Then, early this week, Zachary's mother, Monica Adams, got the news that Zachary was matched with stem cells from an umbilical cord.

"I was like jumping and screaming," Adams said. "It was an exciting moment."

Blood taken from an umbilical cord is rich in stem cells and can be used in place of bone marrow in some medical procedures. The blood samples collected from local donors won't be processed for three to five weeks, said event organizer Brenda Tomlinson.

Zachary will check into an Ann Arbor hospital April 8 and start chemotherapy that will kill off all of his defective white blood cells. If everything goes as planned, he will receive the transplant April 15. The process will be a dangerous one for Zachary, who will have no defense against infections at the time.

Adams, who recently lost her job, is trying to raise money for gas and meals during her stay in Ann Arbor. Her lodging is being provided.

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