BLOOD donation drives are turning into bonding sessions for teens.

Going in groups takes some of the sting out of the experience, they say, and turns them into social events.

The trend has boosted the numbers of young blood donors. The Singapore Red Cross reports that the number of donors in the 10 to 25 age group rose by about 30 per cent—from 15,753 in 2001 to 20,454 last year.

One regular donor is National University of Singapore (NUS) pharmacy student Jasmine Ong, 20. She always goes with friends to donate.

"Whenever there's a blood donation drive, friends will call me up. And I'll pull along my other friends, who will also bring their own friends. A whole chain of us will turn up eventually," she says.

Many send each other mass text messages, getting them to join them during the hour-long wait. Some go as far as to ditch lessons en masse during donation drives at schools.

Peer pressure goes a long way. Joanna Chua, 20, an engineering student at NUS, says: "We experienced ones will challenge the first donors to donate. And if they feel faint when they see the needle, we become their personal cheering squad and make them feel better.

Such sessions also have the merit of being a do-good activity, say youth organisers of blood donation drives. Said the president of the Singapore University of Technology and Technology (NTU) Chapter of the Red Cross Humanitarian Network (RCHN), Mr Medy, 22, who goes by just the one name: "Many youths like to come in cliques. The largest group I've seen is 22 students, all from NTU, who even dragged their tutor along with them."

One young couple see donating blood as a good way to spend time together. The 15-year-olds, who wanted to be identified only as Peter and Amanda, ditched their plans to "do the usual" - stay at Victoria - in favour of taking part in a donation drive at the Harbourfront MRT Station.

The pair, who graduated from Anderson Junior College last year, donated blood at Venite Blood 2007, a drive organised by the RCHN's NTU and NUS chapters on June 22 and 23.

Peter, who is currently completing his National Service, said: "This is time we spend better spent than just hanging around malls. It's meaningful and more enjoyable."

The trend has not escaped donation-drive organisers, who have swarmed drives with games of fun.

Youth Favourites, a blood donation drive organised by the Youth Donor Club of the Singapore Red Cross, will incorporate a "free" band and raffle draw.

In refreshments corner will get a makeover too - instead of the usual Milo and biscuits, soy bean bread Mr Bean will serve drizzle and green bean biscuits.

Blood donation drive organiser Aaron Tan, 20, president of the Singapore Management University Chapter of the RCHN, pointed out: "This is so that youths won't see donating blood as a boring activity, but something which they and their friends can go for and enjoy."

-- The Straits Times