

# History of the Ban on Blood Donations by Men who Have Sex with Men



**pivot**

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## 1981 - 1982

- The Centers for Disease Control publishes first report on the disease in 1981.
- First reports of individuals who may have contracted disease through blood transfusions reported in 1982.

# 1982

- In the Summer of 1982 a meeting is convened between the CDC, FDA, blood industry, gay rights groups and hemophilia groups. No action taken although the term AIDS is first created at this meeting.
- A few facilities voluntarily begin screening of blood for hepatitis antibodies to screen out blood donations by those at high-risk for AIDS.

# 1983

- Secretary of Health and Human Services Margaret Heckler declares that the blood supply is completely safe.
  - “I want to assure the American people that the blood supply is 100% safe. The blood supply is safe both for the hemophiliac who requires large transfusions and for the average citizen who might need it for surgery.”

# 1983-1984

- Blood industry advocates state that the risk of being infected with AIDS through blood transfusion is about 1 in a million
- Dr. Joseph Bove, head of the FDA's Blood Advisory Committee is quoted in the Wall Street Journal stating that more people are killed by bee stings than transfusion-related AIDS.

# 1983-1984

- 1983 - Non-mandatory guidelines are put into place advising those at high-risk for HIV (including “sexually active homosexual and bisexual men with multiple partners”) to refrain from donating blood.
- 1984 – Policy broadened to defer all “males who have had sex with more than one male since 1979.”

# 1985

- 1985 – Policy further broadened to defer any male who has had sex with a male (even once) since 1977.
- In 1985 the first antibody test for HIV was licensed. Widespread screening of blood for HIV was instituted.

# Morbidity and Mortality

- Between 1981-1984, 50% of the hemophiliac patients in the U.S. had become infected with AIDS.
- 10,000 hemophiliacs contracted HIV and nearly 8,000 have died from AIDS.
- CDC reported in 2001 that 14,262 individuals had been diagnosed with AIDS due to hemophiliac risk or blood transfusion.

# Today

- In 1984 it was discovered that by heat treating clotting factors used by hemophiliacs, the risk for contracting HIV could be eliminated for hemophiliacs.
- Today the risk for contracting HIV through blood transfusions is nearly non-existent and is estimated to be 1 in 1,467,000 (down from 1 in 2500 in 1984).

# Screening criteria

- Anyone wishing to donate blood is screened using a donor history questionnaire.
- Specifically asks male donors:
  - From 1977 to the present have you had sexual contact with another male, even once?

# Screening Criteria

- Screener does not distinguish between low-risk MSM sex and some high-risk heterosexual sex.
- Different deferral periods for risk behaviors
  - MSM risk: permanent deferral
  - Sex with PLWHA: 1 year deferral

# Testing

- Today all donated blood is tested using Nucleic ACID Testing (NAT) rather than antibody tests which are given in testing sites such as Pivot.
- NAT is much more sensitive than antibody testing and closes the time period for detecting HIV infection to less than two weeks after infection.

# Changes to Policy

- The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and its Blood Product Advisory Committee (BPAC) is responsible for overseeing blood safety in the U.S. and making recommendations for policy changes.
- FDA met in 2000 and 2006 to discuss changes to the deferral policy but took no action to change policy.

# Blood Bank Advocacy

- The American Association of Blood Banks, American Red Cross and America's Blood Centers released a joint statement in 2006 and again in 2010 advocating for a change in the screening process.
  - “Current lifetime deferral for men who have had sex with other men is medically and scientifically unwarranted.”
  - Recommendation for a 12-month deferral period for MSM.

# International Policies

- The U.K. is currently reviewing its policies. Canada's policy on deferring MSM is the same as the U.S.
- Lifted ban – Russia
- 6 month deferral – South Africa
- 1 year deferral – Argentina, Australia, Hungary, Japan, Sweden
- 5 year deferral – New Zealand

# International Policies

- Screening based on high-risk behavior and not MSM-specific:
  - Spain: Defers anyone who has engaged in high-risk sex for 12-months.
  - France: Defers anyone who has had unprotected sex for 4-months.

# Impact of Change

- Researchers at UCLA have reported that if the lifetime deferral for MSM was changed to a 12-month deferral, an additional 219,000 pints of blood would be donated a year.
- Williams Institute estimates that 53,269 additional men would donate 89,716 pints of blood a year if the lifetime deferral for MSM was changed to a 12-month deferral

# Recent News

- In March 2010 Gay Men's Health Crisis released a comprehensive report on reforming U.S. blood donation policies.
- Led by Senator John Kerry, 43 U.S. senators and congresspersons sent a letter to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) advocating for a change to blood donation policies.

# Recent News

- In June the HHS Advisory Committee on Blood Safety and Availability met to discuss the blood donation policy.
- Committee voted 9-6 to uphold ban but expressed reservations about the current policy.
  - “We believe that the current donor deferral policies are suboptimal in permitting some potentially high-risk donations while preventing some potentially low risk infections.”

# Recent News

- The committee also recommended that research be made into:
  - Modifying the donor screening questionnaire to better differentiate between low and high risk MSM and heterosexuals.
  - Researching impact of donor guidelines internationally which have permitted blood donations by MSM.