



America's Blood Centers®  
It's About *Life*.

# Blood Donation & Gay and Bisexual Men: A History

America's Blood Centers strongly supports a safe and available blood supply that treats all potential donors with fairness, equality, and respect. The use of rational, science-based deferral periods must be applied fairly and consistently among all blood donors.

All U.S. blood centers are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and must adhere to their donor eligibility policies. When FDA changes to donor eligibility occur, blood centers must undertake extensive changes, including updating their computer systems and donor history questionnaires. Some of these changes require additional FDA approval. As a result, it requires time for blood centers to start welcoming donors impacted by any change.

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The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) initially instituted a lifetime deferral on blood donations for gay and bisexual men to reduce the chance of HIV in the blood supply at a time when testing was limited or non-existent.

## 1983

This move was perceived by many as inconsistent because gay and bisexual men are permanently deferred while individuals who had other HIV risks are deferred for one year after the event. The inconsistency led gay rights advocacy groups, many of them campus-based, to protest the lifetime donor deferral policy.

Other groups excluded from giving blood under the HIV deferral criteria include those born in sub-Saharan Africa and those who have ever used intravenous drugs, along with individuals who have exchanged money for sex.

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## 2015

The FDA revised its policy and moved to a 12-month deferral in response to comprehensive testing and data demonstrating safety in shortened deferral. America's Blood Centers proposed changing the deferral for gay and bisexual men from the current lifetime deferral to one year in 2000, saying it would not increase the risk of HIV infection in the blood supply.

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### 2020

The FDA changed its policy in 2020, reducing the donor deferral period from 12 to three months for gay and bisexual men. This change was made during a time when the COVID pandemic was straining our nation's blood supply. America's Blood Centers strongly supported this change.

### 2021

The Assessing Donor Variability and New Concepts in Eligibility (ADVANCE) Study is launched to examine this deferral policy. This initiative is a pilot study funded by the FDA seeking to determine if different eligibility criteria can be used at blood centers nationwide that focuses on each donor's individual risk behavior rather than their sexual orientation. Three blood collection organizations, including ABC-members OneBlood and Vitalant, collaborated with LGBTQ community centers and organizations in eight locations to enroll participants.

### 2022

ADVANCE Study enrollment concluded on September 30, 2022. Researchers from the participating blood centers will complete their final work by the end of this year, including follow-up visits with participants. Information will be forward to the FDA, who will determine next steps.

### Learn More

This deferral remains in place today because, while HIV testing is better than ever, there is still a remote chance that HIV and other diseases may be transmitted via blood transfusions because of donations made during the window period of infection (the time between infection and its ability to be recognized by testing) and potential for errors.

Founded in 1962, America's Blood Centers is the national organization bringing together community-based, independent blood centers. Its member organizations operate more than 600 blood collection sites providing close to 60 percent of the U.S., and a quarter of the Canadian, blood supply. Learn more at [AmericasBlood.org](https://AmericasBlood.org).



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