

# UPDATE: Effects of Lifting Blood Donation Bans on Men who Have Sex with Men



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The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) prohibits the donation of blood by any man who has had sex with another man (MSM) since 1977.<sup>i</sup> This research brief uses population-based data sources to update estimates of the size of the MSM population and estimates of blood donation patterns in the US to predict the impact of lifting the ban on the nation's blood supply.<sup>ii</sup> Our analyses suggest that lifting the ban could increase the total annual blood supply by 2%-4%, adding from 345,400 to 615,300 pints of blood each year.

## Introduction

The FDA's blood ban on men who have sex with men prohibits such men from ever donating blood. In recent years, both the United Kingdom and Canada have made changes to their laws shifting from an indefinite deferral of MSM to a twelve-month and five-year deferral, respectively.<sup>iii</sup> In Mexico, new regulations have established criteria for blood donation based on risk factors for transmission of blood-borne diseases.<sup>iv</sup>

Despite these changes in deferral policies internationally and public pressure domestically to end the current ban on MSM blood donation, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has continued to maintain its position.<sup>v</sup> The Advisory Committee on Blood and Tissue Safety and Availability ("ACBTSA") has decided not to recommend any changes to the deferral policy, citing a need to first "establish and fund an ongoing, integrated, coordinated, and nationally representative U.S. transfusion transmissible infections monitoring system."<sup>vi</sup> The American Red Cross, American Association of Blood Banks, and America's Blood Centers have since issued a joint statement calling for modification of the lifetime deferral and further consideration of a twelve-month deferral for MSM.<sup>vii</sup>

This research brief predicts the impact of lifting the ban on the nation's blood supply under three scenarios: the lifting of the ban entirely, the granting of a twelve-month deferral to MSM, and the granting of a five-year deferral to MSM.

## Data and Methodology

We combine three waves of the biennial General Social Survey (GSS) conducted in 2008, 2010, and 2012, a nationally representative sample of adults in the US, to estimate the MSM population of adults (age 18 and older).<sup>viii</sup> Table 1 reports an estimate of the adult MSM population in the US based on the percentage of adult men reporting a male sex partner since age 18 and US Census Bureau estimates of the population of adult men.<sup>ix</sup> These MSM constitute the group we consider to be currently excluded from donating blood.<sup>x</sup>

In the US, 8.5% of men (10 million) say that they have had at least one male sexual partner since age 18. GSS data show that 4.1% of men (4.8 million) have had a male sex partner in the last five years, and 3.8% of men (4.5 million men) reported having a male sex partner in the last twelve months.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 781,300 MSM are living with HIV.<sup>xi</sup> We exclude them from estimates of possible new donors,<sup>xii</sup> as they would be excluded through the pre-donation donor questionnaire or during routine blood screening used to test every donation.

An estimated 45.4% of men (54 million) in the US are eligible to donate blood.<sup>xiii</sup> Approximately 8.7% of eligible men actually donate blood.<sup>xiv</sup> Annually, there are approximately 15.7 million donations of blood per year made by 9.2 million donors, yielding approximately 1.7 donations per donor.<sup>xv</sup>



**Table 1. Estimates of the MSM population in the United States**

Report at least one male sex partner:	% of Men	# of Men <sup>xvi</sup>
Since Age 18	8.5%	10,033,500
In Last 5 Years	4.1%	4,839,700
In Last 12 Months	3.8%	4,485,600

Source: General Social Survey 2008-2012 and US Census Bureau, 2013 Population Estimates.

### Findings

Using the assumptions described above, we estimate the number of MSM who would be newly eligible to donate blood, would likely donate, and the number of donations resulting under three scenarios. Results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Estimates of Number of Men Who May Donate Blood**

	# Eligible to Donate	# Likely to Donate	# of Pints Donated
Lifting of Blood Donation Ban	4,200,500	360,600	615,300
Twelve-Month Deferral	2,164,100	185,800	317,000
Five-Year Deferral	2,003,300	172,000	293,400

If the current MSM ban were completely lifted, we estimate that an additional 360,600 men would likely donate 615,300 additional pints of blood each year. If MSM who have not had sexual contact with another man in the past twelve months were permitted to donate, we estimate that 185,800 additional men are likely to donate 317,000 additional pints of blood each year. If MSM who have not had sexual contact with another man in the past five years were permitted to donate, we estimate that 172,000 additional men would make an additional 293,400 blood donations.

### Conclusion

Our analyses suggest that lifting the ban could increase the total annual blood supply by 2%-4%.<sup>xvii</sup> The American Red Cross suggests that each blood donation has the potential to be used in life-saving procedures on three individuals. Our estimates suggest that lifting the blood donation ban among MSM could be used to help save the lives of more than 1.8 million people.

### About the authors

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### About the Institute

**The Williams Institute** on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Law and Public Policy at UCLA School of Law advances law and public policy through rigorous, independent research and scholarship, and disseminates its work through a variety of education programs and media to judges, legislators, lawyers, other policymakers and the public.

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