The Bad Seed

Is the hard science of homophobia behind the ban on gay sperm-bank deposits?

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The nation’s sperm supply is so safe that only one case of HIV transmission via donated semen has been documented since antibody testing began in 1985. But on May 25, the FDA issued new screening guidelines, banning donations from men who’ve had sex with men (MSM) within the past five years, grouping all gay men with high-risk groups like sex workers, people with hemophilia, ex-prisoners and IV drug users. The guidance makes official the 1994 recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which had already prevented MSMs from donating to all but a few banks, even though all sperm are tested, frozen for six months and tested again to rule out infectious disease.

Gay and AIDS activists slammed the ban for fueling stigma by unfairly equating gay men with HIV when the latest CDC estimates confirm that in fact 55% of the 1.1 million HIV infections in the U.S. are among heterosexuals. Hayley Gorenberg, deputy legal director of Lambda Legal, dubbed the ban sexual profiling. She notes that HIV rates are also high among people of color, “but it would be wrong to restrict sperm donation based on race.”

Defending the new guidelines, FDA rep Lenore Gelb told POZ: “It is not only based on science but on many things.” Until sperm banks come around, direct deposit may be the only hope.

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