# FDA Study to Explore Easing Rules on Blood Donation by Gay and Bi Men

Currently, gay and bisexual men can donate blood if they have not had sex for three months.

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The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has launched a pilot study to help it assess whether to relax its rules on when gay and bisexual men can donate blood, reports Newsweek.

In March 2020, in an effort to increase blood donations during the COVID-19 pandemic, the FDA announced that men who have sex with men (MSM) would be allowed to donate blood once they've been celibate for three months. Since 2015, because of fears over bloodborne pathogens such as HIV, gay and bisexual men had been required to abstain from sex for an entire year before they could donate blood. For more about the recent updates, see "FDA Eases Its Ban on Blood Donations From Gay and Bi Men."

Many advocates claim that the three-month abstinence requirement is still too strict, as it is based on the donor's sexual preference and perceived risk and not actual risk or real-life sexual activity. For example, as Newsweek points out, a gay man would be prohibited from donating blood to his own dying husband—even if the couple were monogamous—unless they hadn't had sex during the previous three months.

With the new pilot study, the FDA aims to learn whether the data support easing the ban. A spokesperson told Newsweek, "The FDA remains committed to considering alternatives to time-based deferral by generating the scientific evidence that is intended to support an individual risk assessment–based blood donor questionnaire."

The pilot study is titled ADVANCE: Assessing Donor Variability and New Concepts in Eligibility and is being conducted with the collaboration of select LGBT community centers nationwide as well as three of the largest blood centers in the United States—the American Red Cross, OneBlood and Valiant.

Earlier this month, the United Kingdom announced it was relaxing its rules regarding blood donation by gay and bi men. Specifically, starting next summer, men who have sex with men will be allowed to donate blood if they've been in a long-term monogamous relationship for at least three months before making the donation. The men must also not be taking PEP (postexposure prophylaxis) or PreP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) and must not have a known exposure to a sexually

transmitted infection.

Canadian activists are pressuring their government to ease is restrictions, which currently require gay and bi men to be celibate for a year. To learn more about the situation in both countries, see "U.K. to Relax Rules Banning Blood Donations From Gay and Bi Men."

Did you know that blood is one of six bodily fluids that can transmit HIV? The others are semen, pre-cum, rectal fluids, vaginal fluids and breast milk. The POZ HIV/AIDS Basics offers much more info, especially the section on HIV Transmission and Risk.

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