Scotland Upholds Ban on MSM Blood Donations

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Health officials in Scotland rejected on November 5 a petition to lift a ban on blood donations from men who have sex with men (MSM), The Scotsman reports. Officials linked the current rise in new HIV infections among MSM in the country to risks of contaminating the blood supply.

“We recognize that many gay men sincerely wish to help patients by giving blood and may be frustrated as a result of this rule,” a Scottish government spokeswoman said. “Advances in blood transfusion safety procedures may allow gay and bisexual men to donate in the future, but until then, priority has to be given to securing the safety of the blood supply.”

According to the article, all blood donations are tested for blood-borne infections such as HIV, hepatitis B and C and syphilis. However, the tests do not detect very early stage infections.

Activists call the ban “outdated, stereotypical and discriminatory toward healthy gay men.”

Aside from MSM, other groups prevented from giving blood are anyone who has had unprotected sex with a sex worker in the past year, anyone who has had sex overseas in a country or region with high HIV prevalence—such as sub-Saharan Africa—in the past year and anyone who has had sex with an intravenous drug user in the past 12 months.

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