A Possible End to the Ban on Gay Blood Donors?

The FDA seeks public comments on its deferral policy to reduce HIV risk. Currently, gay men must be celibate one year to donate blood.

July 26, 2016

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) posted a request for public comments on its blood donor policy to reduce HIV risk. Under current rules, men are banned from donating blood if they've had sex with another man the previous year. In other words, gay men must be celibate for one year to donate blood.

Although the request for comments doesn't mention the gay blood ban, the move could be a signal that the FDA is reconsidering its policy. A lifetime ban on gay donors was put in place during the early days of the AIDS epidemic, when fear ran high and information about the virus was low. Under that policy, men were not allowed to donate blood if they'd ever had sex with another man since 1977. That was updated in 2015 to the current ban.

The one-year-of-celibacy policy is an improvement, but it has been met with public criticism—including the Blood Mirror project—and numerous campaigns calling for another overhaul, such as the Celibacy Challenge and #BloodEquality.

Here is the request for comment as it appears on FDA.org:

> Request for comment by November 23, 2016: Blood Donor Deferral Policy for Reducing the Risk of Human Immunodeficiency Virus Transmission by Blood and Blood Products
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> The FDA announced an opportunity for public comment on the Agency's blood donor deferral recommendations for reducing the risk of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) transmission as described in the document entitled "Revised Recommendations for Reducing the Risk of Human Immunodeficiency Virus Transmission by Blood and Blood Products; Guidance for Industry" dated December 2015. Interested persons are invited to submit comments, supported by scientific evidence such as data from research, regarding potential blood donor deferral policy options to reduce the risk of HIV transmission, including the feasibility of moving from the existing time-based deferrals related to risk behaviors to alternate deferral options, such as the use of individual risk assessments. Additionally, comments are invited

regarding the design of potential studies to evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of such alternative deferral options. FDA will take the comments received into account as it continues to reevaluate and update blood donor deferral policies as new scientific information becomes available. To read the entire Federal Register Notice and to make comments electronically.

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