

Blood Donation Policy

Keeping it evidence-based and inclusive



In 2016, Terrence Higgins Trust, the UK's largest provider of HIV and sexual health services, was invited to sit on the working group on blood donations that fed into the government's Advisory Committee on the Safety of Blood, tissues and Organs (SaBTO). SaBTO recommendations, approved by the Government in full, were released in July 2017.

Terrence Higgins Trust conducted research on [sex workers and blood donations](#) which was used as evidence to lift the lifetime ban on sex workers giving blood to a 3 month abstinence. Our research showed that 98% of former and current sex workers surveyed regarded their sexual health as very important and the same percentage, so 98% of former and current sex workers surveyed knew their HIV status. There is no definitive evidence to say all sex workers are at an increased risk of HIV and other blood borne, sexually transmitted viruses. Thanks to our research and its evidence we suggested that Government should abolish the lifetime ban on donating blood for current and former sex workers and to replace it with a three month deferral, as is now the case for gay and bisexual men (see below). We were thrilled that the Government decided to implement our recommendations.

Other positive recommendations made in July 2017 included lowering the deferral period for men who have sex with men (MSM) from 12 months to 3 months, as well as lifting the lifetime ban on people who used to inject drugs to a 12 month deferral period.

Evidence around behaviour

We approached the blood donations review from an evidence-based perspective and therefore our focus is around behaviour. Certain behaviours make HIV transmission more likely, including anal and, to a much smaller extent, oral sex between men. HIV rates remain high in men who have sex with men with 2015 seeing 54% of new diagnoses of HIV among MSM. Compared with sex between a man and a woman, it is statistically far more likely that sex between two men will involve at least one partner who has HIV. Additionally, about one in six gay or bi men who have HIV don't yet know it, because they remain untested.

What we are calling for now...

We are now calling on the government to regularly review the deferral periods so that they are always up-to-date with the latest evidence. We also want to see the government invest in robust scientific research into the risks of contracting blood borne viruses posed by MSM who only engage in oral sex. We know from our clinical and epidemiological work that MSM who only engage in oral sex are at a very low risk of contracting HIV. We also would like the Government to explore the possibilities around individual risk assessments, as the Welsh Government has already committed to doing.

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The HIV and sexual health charity for life

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