



Effects of Lifting Blood Donation Bans on Men Who Have Sex with Men

The Food and Drug Administration prohibits the donation of blood by any man who has had sex with another man (MSM) since 1977. This research brief uses data sources to estimate the size of the MSM population and apply those estimates to blood donation patterns in the US to predict the impact of lifting the ban on the nation’s blood supply.

Introduction

Since 1986, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has prohibited the donation of blood by any man who has had sex with another man (MSM) since 1977.¹ Such men are prohibited from ever donating blood. FDA regulations also indicate that men who have sex with men in the past five years are ineligible for cell and tissue donation, though this restriction does not apply broadly to organ donation.²

Both the American Red Cross and the American Association of Blood Banks report that the current FDA ban on MSM blood donation “is medically and scientifically unwarranted.”³ This research brief predicts the impact of lifting the ban on the nation’s blood supply under three scenarios: the lifting of the ban entirely, the granting of a twelve-month deferral to MSM, and the granting of a five-year deferral to MSM.

Data and Methodology

We combine five waves of the biennial General Social Survey (GSS) from 2000 through 2008, a nationally representative sample of adults in the US, to estimate the MSM population of adults (age 18 and older).⁴ Table 1 reports the percent of adult men reporting a male sex partner since age 18 and US Census Bureau estimates of the population of adult men.⁵ These MSM constitute the group we consider to be currently excluded from donating blood.⁶

More than 6% of men (7.2 million) say that they have had at least one male sexual partner since age 18. GSS data also show that 4.0% of men (4.5 million men) have had a male sex partner in the past five years and 3.5% (3.9 million men) reported having a male sex partner in the last year.

The Centers for Disease Control estimate that 532,000 MSM are HIV-positive.⁷ We exclude them from estimates of possible new donors⁸, as they would be excluded through the pre-donation donor questionnaire.

Statistics from the American Red Cross suggest that 39% of HIV-negative adults are eligible to donate blood in a given year, but

Table 1:

Estimates of MSM in the United States

Report at least one male sex partner:	% of Men	# of Men
Since Age 18	6.4%	7,168,638
In Last 5 Years	4.0%	4,480,398
In Last 12 Months	3.5%	3,920,349

Source: General Social Survey, 2000-2008 and American Community Survey, 2008.

only 5% will actually donate.⁹ Annually, there are approximately 16 million donations (of a pint of blood) made by 9.5 million donors, yielding approximately 1.7 donations per donor.¹⁰

Unfortunately, similar statistics regarding cell and tissue donation are not available, so we are unable to estimate the impact of a policy change on those donation patterns.

Findings

Blood Donation

Using the assumptions described above, we estimate the number of MSM who would be eligible to donate blood, would likely donate, and the number of donations resulting under three scenarios. Results are shown in Table 2, Panel 1.

If the current MSM ban were completely lifted, we estimate that an additional 130,150 men would likely donate 219,200 additional pints of blood each year.

If MSM who have not had sexual contact with another man in the past twelve months were permitted to donate, we estimate that 53,269 additional men are likely to donate 89,716 pints each year. If MSM who have not had sexual contact with another man in the past five years were permitted to donate, we estimate that 42,286 additional men would make 71,218 blood donations.

Conclusion

Since American Red Cross and the American Association of Blood Banks have declared that the current FDA blanket ban on blood donation by MSM is unwarranted there have been new calls to reconsider current policies.¹¹ Our analyses suggest that lifting the ban could increase the total annual US blood supply by 0.6% to 1.4%. While these increases in the blood supply may seem modest, they would occur in an environment where blood supply shortages are common.¹²

Table 2:

Panel 1. Estimates of Number of Men Who May Donate Blood

	# Eligible to Donate	# Likely to Donate	# of Pints Donated
Lifting of Blood Donation Ban	2,603,004	130,150	219,200
Twelve-Month Deferral	1,065,375	53,269	89,716
Five-Year Deferral	845,714	42,286	71,218

¹ Blood Facts and Statistics. American Red Cross Web site. <http://www.redcrossblood.org/learn-about-blood/blood-facts-and-statistics>. Accessed May 5, 2010; Who Can Donate. United States Department of Health and Human Services Web site. http://organdonor.gov/donation/who_donate.htm. Accessed May 5, 2010.

² Guidance for Industry: Eligibility determination for donors of human cells, tissues, and cellular and tissue-based products. Food and Drug Administration Web site. <http://www.fda.gov/downloads/BiologicsBloodVaccines/GuidanceComplianceRegulatoryInformation/Guidances/CellularandGeneTherapy/ucm078703.pdf>. Accessed May 5, 2010.

³ Kleinman S. Behavior-Based Blood Donors Deferrals in the Era of Nucleic Acid Testing (NAT). AABB Web site.

http://www.aabb.org/Content/Members_Area/Members_Area_Regulatory/Donor_Suitability/bpacdefernat030906.htm. Accessed May 5, 2010.

⁴ Data from five General Social Surveys conducted between 2000 and 2008 were combined to yield estimates of the number of men who report same-sex sex partners since age 18, in the past five years, and in the past year. Estimates of men reporting at least one same-sex sex partner since age 18 are based upon the following question, "Again, thinking about the time since your 18th birthday, (including the recent past that you have already told us about) how many male partners have you ever had sex with?" Any man indicating one or more male partners was counted as an MSM in this report. Five-year and twelve-month estimates are based upon the following question, "Have your sex partners in the last 12 months (five years) been exclusively male, both male and female, or exclusively female?" Respondents who indicated "exclusively male" or "both male and female" were considered MSM in this report. Analyses were conducted using the Survey Document and Analysis (SDA) website: <http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcsda+gss08>. Accessed May 5, 2010.

⁵ Table B15001_2 EST: Men age 18 and older. American Community Survey, 2008, U.S. Census Bureau Web site. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>. Accessed May 5, 2010.

⁶ The current FDA policy excludes any man who reports having a male sex partner since 1977 from donating blood. We must assume that all men who report at least one male sex partner since age 18 are currently ineligible to donate since we cannot separately identify men whose male sex partnerships occurred before 1977 (these men are technically eligible to donate). As a result, our estimates of newly eligible donors may include some men who are already eligible. This upward bias is likely quite small. If we assume that most MSM activity occurs as adults then we are possibly misclassifying only men who are age 51 or older who had a sex partner before 1977 but not since.

⁷ CDC Fact Sheet: HIV and AIDS among Gay and Bisexual Men. Centers for Disease Control Web site. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchstp/Newsroom/docs/FastFacts-MSM-FINAL508COMP.pdf>. Accessed May 5, 2010.

⁸ We do not have data that allows us to estimate the number of HIV+ MSM who have had sex with a man in the last five years or in the last year. As such, we take the most conservative approach and assume that all HIV+ MSM have had recent same-sex sexual activity and thus subtract the total number of HIV+ MSM from each of the three groups of MSM (had sex with a man since age 18, had sex with a man in the last five years, and had sex with a man in the last year) we analyze.

⁹ American Red Cross statistics show that 87 million adults (or 38%) in the US population are eligible to donate blood. To calculate the percent of the US population that is eligible to donate, excluding MSM, we take the adult population in the US (230 million) and subtract the estimated MSM population (7.2), yielding nearly 223 million people. Assuming again that 87 million adults are likely eligible, dividing this figure by the adult population excluding MSM means that 39% of the US population excluding MSM are eligible to donate. We thus use this figure to calculate what percent of non-HIV positive MSM may also be eligible donate. Blood Facts and Statistics. American Red Cross Web site. <http://www.redcrossblood.org/learn-about-blood/blood-facts-and-statistics>. Accessed May 5, 2010.

¹⁰ Blood Facts and Statistics. American Red Cross Web site. <http://www.redcrossblood.org/learn-about-blood/blood-facts-and-statistics>. Accessed May 7, 2010.

¹¹ Zajac Andrew. Deadly blood colors debate. *Los Angeles Times*. April 4, 2010. <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-gays-blood4-2010apr04,0,5666237,full.story>. Accessed May 7, 2010.

¹² Data from DHHS show that there are 107,028 candidates on organ waiting lists as of April 19, 2010. OrganDonor.Gov Web site. <http://organdonor.gov/>. Accessed May 5, 2010; Blood Facts and Statistics. American Red Cross Web site. <http://www.redcrossblood.org/learn-about-blood/blood-facts-and-statistics>. Accessed May 7, 2010.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Naomi G. Goldberg, MPP, is the Peter J. Cooper Public Policy Fellow at the Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law. Her research interests focus on policies affecting families.

Gary J. Gates, PhD, is the Williams Distinguished Scholar at the Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law. He studies the demographic and economic characteristics of the lesbian and gay population.

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For more information, contact:

The Williams Institute

UCLA School of Law

Box 951476

Los Angeles, CA 90095-1476

T (310)267-4382

F (310)825-7270

williamsinstitute@law.ucla.edu

www.law.ucla.edu/williamsinstitute