



“UK” blood donation criteria has changed

What is changing?

People previously prohibited from donating due to potential exposure to variant Creutzfeldt Jakob disease (vCJD) can now donate blood, as long as they are otherwise eligible. This includes:

- People who spent more than three months in the UK (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland), Isle of Man, Channel Islands, Gibraltar or the Falkland Islands between 1980 and 1996
- People who spent five years or more in France and Ireland between 1 January 1980 to 31 December 2001

Why has this criteria changed?

Extensive reviews on the potential risks of transmitting vCJD via blood transfusion have indicated there it is safe to change the criteria and other countries, such as the US and Australia have already changed their criteria. There have been no cases of vCJD in Bermuda, and since the first case identified in 1996 there have been only about 232 cases worldwide, 178 of which have been in the UK. Cases in the UK have been declining since 2003, with only two cases in the last ten years.

Why were people prohibited from donating before?

There was a lot of uncertainty about the potential risks of infection from vCJD in 1999/2000 when the infections in the UK peaked. As there was no immediate test for the disease, Bermuda followed the US and prohibited people from donating if they had stayed in the UK or certain other countries as a precaution. Over the last 20 years, the number of vCJD cases has declined. The last identified case in the UK was in 2016.

Which other countries have changed this criteria?

Ireland changed in 2019, Australia and the US in 2022.

Can blood be tested for vCJD?

There is currently no commercially available test for vCJD. This is why we have been very cautious in reviewing this criteria.

How can we be certain our blood remains safe?

There has been detailed modelling using all available information to assess the risks associated with these criteria. This research indicated that it was safe to change. The Ireland, the US and Australia have all changed this criteria.

As a small jurisdiction we review the research and decisions of blood transfusion services around the world. Even so, the criteria change went through a process of review and approval in Bermuda.

