



Sexual activity and blood donation



1. Why is my sexual activity relevant to donating blood?

Certain sexual behaviours increase your risk of getting a sexually transmitted disease that can be transmitted in blood, including HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C. All donated blood is tested for such blood-borne viruses, but there is a risk of a false negative in the first 12 weeks of an infection. We therefore ask people to defer donating for three months if they have engaged in high-risk sexual activity.

2. What is high-risk sexual activity?

Having sex with multiple partners or a new partner, especially anal sex, increases the risks of a sexually transmitted disease, such as HIV.

3. What are the new criteria?

If you have had anal sex (protected or unprotected) with a new or multiple partners within the last three months, you will be asked to defer your donation for another three months.

4. What other safety criteria are related to preventing HIV and other blood-borne infections?

Deferrals are also required for other HIV risk factors, such as individuals who have exchanged sex for money or drugs, or who have a history of non-prescription injection drug use. People who have taken medications to prevent an HIV infection following a potential exposure would be deferred for three months. Any individual who has ever had a positive HIV test or taken any medication to treat HIV will not be allowed to donate at all.

Why does Bermuda have individual-based sexual activity criteria for blood donation?

Certain sexual behaviours increase the risk of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.

All blood donations are screened, but it is best practice to do everything possible to reduce the risk of someone in the early stages of an HIV infection donating blood. Tests may be less accurate in the first 12 weeks.

Prior to 2024, criteria focused on sexual orientation rather than individual behaviours. However, the risks are higher for all people who have anal sex with multiple partners or new partners.

The current criteria ensure everyone is screened.



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5. Where else in the world do they have similar criteria?

We rely on safety guidance from the US, UK and Canada and they have similar criteria. The organisations that accredit us by reviewing our patient safety standards are from Canada (Accreditation Canada) and the US (the Joint Commission International), so we follow these countries especially closely.

6. Why does everyone have to answer questions about sexual activity? Isn't HIV related to men who have sex with men?

HIV can be transmitted during sex between men and women, so everyone needs to consider their activity. Data released by the UK Health Security Agency in 2022 indicated that the number of new heterosexual HIV diagnoses was higher than for gay and bisexual men. This is an infection that can impact anyone.

7. Aren't these questions very personal? What if I don't want to answer this at the Blood Donor Centre?

You can review the criteria online before donating, or at the Blood Donor Centre. You are not asked the question in person when donating, but given a copy of all the criteria to review. You do not need to say which one applies to you if you realise you should defer, but our Blood Donor Centre staff are always happy to discuss the criteria with you and will always keep your information confidential. Nothing is shared outside of the service, not even with your GP.

8. Aren't certain groups at more risk of HIV?

The risk of an HIV infection is primarily driven by sexual behaviour. A person who is in a monogamous relationship with a partner is at much lower risk of an HIV infection irrespective of their orientation. The focus, therefore, is on an individual risk assessment, rather than focusing on one group.

9. Does it make any difference if an individual used a condom?

The accepted criteria in the US, UK and Canada apply whether or not a condom was used. While it is much safer to use a condom with new or multiple partners, it is possible a donor might not reliably recall whether one was used, or there could have been a break or fail in the condom without the donor knowing.