

FOUNDATION BEYOND BELIEF

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Beyond Belief Network Guides: Advocating against the men who have sex with men blood deferral period

We've all heard calls for donation when blood stores run low in our local communities or during and after an emergency. But, not all healthy people can donate blood. Millions of U.S. residents still cannot donate blood due to a discriminatory policy excluding men who have had sex with other men (MSM) within the last three months. Female and nonbinary partners of MSM are also prohibited from donating blood for three months following their "exposure" to that man. This time frame is not based on any scientific research or criteria.

Foundation Beyond Belief is calling on secular volunteers across the country to demand this unscientific ban to be lifted and replaced with individualized risk-based assessments. This change would align U.S. policy with evidence-based best practices and would improve the safety of blood donation from all sources.

What can you do?

Are you organizing your own blood drive?

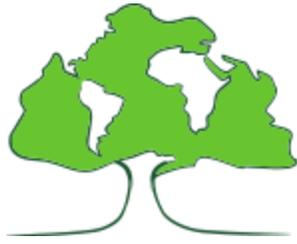
First of all, thank you for donating blood! By spreading awareness of the MSM deferral issue at the same time, you're making two important impacts at once.

At your blood drive, you'll want to plan to cooperate with the blood bank to peacefully spread awareness of the MSM blood ban to other donors and collect petition signatures.

We do *not* encourage antagonizing the blood bank, vilifying blood drives, or boycotting blood donation.

That said, here's what you *can* do:

- **Ask if the blood bank will permit you to set up a table or cabinet.** Distribute literature, be visible, and talk to the community there.



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- **Collect petition signatures.** Bring a laptop or tablet and ask other donors to sign your petition to the FDA. (See below for sample petition language)
- **Talk to other donors about the issue.**
- **Hand out literature** ([see a sample flyer here](#)).
- **Tell people what you're up to on social media.** Make sure to include details about your planned advocacy when you announce the drive on your Facebook or Meetup event.
- **Post about it afterward.** Take pictures of your advocacy in action and let everyone know how your event went. Share the results with us and we'll help amplify them!
- **Be visible!** Wear shirts or buttons that prompt people to ask you about the campaign. Build an eye-catching display!



Example of an awareness table at a blood drive, courtesy of the [LGBT Bar](#).

Are you MSM?

- **Attend a drive as a MSM activist** Talk to people at the drive about why you aren't allowed to donate. Consider tabling or wearing a button with a prompt like "ask why I can't donate."
- **Recruit straight allies to donate on your behalf.** Consider raising awareness on social media about the issue and see how many people you can recruit to donate because you are not allowed.



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Can you demonstrate at a blood drive held at your school, workplace, or other community location?

Consider the above recommendations and distribute a letter on campus like [this one](#) used by LGBT Bar activists at Berkley.

Ask the blood bank whether you can volunteer during the event, and use your visibility to help spread the message.

Do not:

- Vilify or discourage blood donation
- Antagonize or protest the blood donation facility or blood drive organizers

Questions or Concerns?

If you need help with planning your event or have additional questions, the best way to contact Foundation Beyond Belief is to use the [contact webform](#), which enables us to track the resolution of your question.



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Sample Petition Letter to the FDA

Stephen Hahn, M.D

The United States Commissioner of Food and Drugs of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration

10903 New Hampshire Ave

Silver Spring, MD 20993-0002

Richard M. Kaufman, M.D.

Chairperson of the Blood Products Advisory Committee of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration

10903 New Hampshire Ave WO71-3103

Silver Spring, MD 20993-0002

Jacquelyn Fredrick, PhD

Chairperson of the Advisory Committee on Blood and Tissue Safety and Availability of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

10903 New Hampshire Ave WO71-3103

Silver Spring, MD 20993-0002

Dear Commissioner Hahn, Chairwoman Kaufman, and Chairman Fredrick,

The undersigned humanists call on the FDA to reevaluate further its outdated and discriminatory blood donation policy.

An unprecedented number of blood drive cancellations as a result of the coronavirus outbreak has led to a severe blood shortage. The blood industry's major organizations, AABB, America's Blood Centers, and the American Red Cross, have reported more than 12,000 blood drives canceled, resulting in some 355,000 fewer blood donations.¹ In response, the U.S. Surgeon General, along with the blood industry, is calling on healthy people to donate blood.

But not all healthy people can donate. Men who have sex with men (MSM) are not allowed to give blood unless they have been completely abstinent for three months preceding the donation. **Female and nonbinary partners of MSM are also prohibited from donating blood for three months following intercourse**

¹ "Blood donors urgently needed to avert shortage amid outbreak," Retrieved from: <https://apnews.com/8ec9fc1a5f2f6e8ec62d6f8a76d54305>.



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with MSM, as are many transgender people. The same restrictions apply to sorely-needed plasma donations for experimental COVID-19 treatments.

The new three-month restriction announced April 2, 2020 is an improvement on the earlier year-long ban, but realistically, this rule is still a categorical prohibition applied to an entire group of people. Using someone's sexual orientation to determine their donor eligibility is not only unscientific, it is discriminatory and perpetuates a dangerous stigma about LGBTQ individuals.

In its stead, the policy should be replaced with an individualized risk assessment for the following reasons:

- **The deferral policy is based on longstanding prejudicial assumptions about LGBTQ people and high-risk behaviors, and is not based on empirical scientific studies. Detection, treatment, and prevention of HIV/AIDS has significantly improved since the original MSM blood ban was instituted. Today, the risk of transmitting HIV through a blood transfusion is 1 in 1.5 million.²**
- **Behavior-based screening for gay, bisexual AND straight individuals would improve the safety of blood from all sources.**

As humanists, atheists, and freethinkers, we are concerned with overcoming dangerous myths and advocating for public policy guided by scientific evidence.

We call on the FDA to reevaluate their outdated discriminatory blood donation policy, and instead implement one based on an individualized risk-based assessment. This assessment should be based on empirically relevant risk factors, not sexual orientation or gender.

[Insert petition signatures here]

²<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/speaking-of-science/wp/2016/06/24/the-governments-ban-on-gay-blood-donors-isnt-science-its-bias/?noredirect=on>