# FDA Lifts Blood Donation Restrictions for Sexually Active Gay and Bisexual Men



The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) lifted long-standing restrictions on blood donations from sexually active gay and bisexual men in May 2023. The agency shifted to a new risk assessment tool that is uniform for all donors, irrespective of sexual orientation, which began implementation in August 2023.

Jose Dominguez, 50, and his husband, Craig Burdett, 62, participated in blood donations for the first time in March 2023 due to these policy changes. Burdett had last donated in 1997 before openly identifying as gay. The revisions are seen as significant, given decades of exclusion based on sexual orientation which began during the initial HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Initially, a lifetime ban was imposed on donations from gay and bisexual men in the 1980s. The rule evolved in 2015, reducing restrictions to those abstinent for one year, and then to 90 days of abstinence in 2020.

The new policy utilizes “gender-inclusive, individual risk-based questions,” assessing all donors based on recent sexual activity and potential HIV transmission risks, rather than sexual orientation. Although it is early to measure the full impact, initial data indicates an increase in previously deferred donors returning to donate blood.

**Impact of New Blood Donation Policy**

Since adopting the FDA's new individual donor assessment, the American Red Cross reports that approximately 8.5% of previously deferred individuals returned to donate within five months. The New York Blood Center and OneBlood in the southeastern U.S. have also seen returning donors under the new guidelines.

Despite the positive response, feelings of resentment remain among some within the gay community who recall the earlier restrictions. However, advocacy groups view the new rules as a progressive step forward in ensuring a safe and equitable blood donation process for all individuals.