



Policy Statement on Donor Screening Guidelines for Blood Donation

Approved September 30, 2004

The HIV Medicine Association (HIVMA) of the Infectious Diseases Society of America represents more than 2,600 physicians, scientists and other health care professionals who practice on the frontline of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. HIVMA strongly supports the development of public policies based on science. It is for this reason that we believe the criteria used by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to exclude potential blood donors should be revised to reflect the reliability of current blood testing technology and scientific knowledge regarding HIV transmission.

In 2002, the Food and Drug Administration approved the Nucleic Acid Amplification Test (NAT) to screen whole blood donors for the HIV-1 virus and the hepatitis C virus (HCV). The NAT reduces the window period for detecting HIV-1 to 11 days and the window period for detecting HCV to 10 days and is now widely used by blood donation centers. A study conducted from 1999 to 2002 among all major blood donation laboratories confirmed that the implementation of the NAT has improved the safety of the blood supply.^[1]

The accuracy and reliability of the NAT coupled with the fact that the HIV virus is transmitted through behaviors and not by sexual orientation^[2] call for significant revisions to the current donor screening guidelines. It is discriminatory and unnecessary to continue to exclude any man who has had sex with another man since 1977 from donating blood. Furthermore, the wholesale exclusion of anyone who has ever used a needle to take drugs or steroids is similarly problematic.

HIVMA recommends that the blood donor screening procedures be revised to ask all potential donors to exclude themselves if they have tested positive for HIV, engaged in unprotected sex with a partner of unknown HIV status or if they have recently used a syringe not prescribed by a physician to take drugs or steroids. To err on the side of caution, the period of risky activity might be defined as the previous six months.

[1] Stramer SL, Glynn SA, Kleinman SH, et al. Detection of HIV-1 and HCV infections among antibody-negative blood donors by nucleic acid-amplification testing. *N Engl J Med* 2004;351:760-8.

[2] The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 33 percent of new HIV infections are transmitted through heterosexual sex; 25 percent through injection drug use and 42 percent through homosexual sex. Source: CDC. HIV/AIDS Update: A Glance at the HIV epidemic. Accessed online <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/stats/hasrsupp.htm> on August 4, 2004.