

Minister of Health



Ministre de la Santé

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0K9

FEB 14 2018

Dear Sir/Madam:

Thank you for your correspondence concerning Canada's blood donor deferral policy for men who have sex with men (MSM).

Canada has one of the safest blood systems in the world thanks to its comprehensive regulatory oversight of the collection of blood. As the federal regulator, Health Canada is responsible for ensuring that Canada's blood supply for transfusion is safe.

Under Canada's blood safety regulations, the blood operators, Canadian Blood Services (CBS) and Héma-Québec (HQ), are required to make submissions to the Department for any proposed changes to their procedures. Such submissions must contain scientific data from studies that support the safety of the proposed changes, as well as the realization of potential benefits.

In June 2016, the Government of Canada approved the reduction of the deferral period from five years to one year as a responsible first step. The authorization of these changes was supported by a thorough review of the scientific evidence provided by the blood operators and brought Canada in line with several other countries which have implemented or are planning on implementing a one-year deferral period for MSM, including the United States, Australia, New Zealand, France, Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands.

In addition to the reduction in the deferral period for MSM, in January 2017, the Government committed \$3 million to CBS, in collaboration with HQ, to make further progress on this issue. This funding helped organize an international health conference on blood donor policy, and will support behavioural research to ensure non-discriminatory practices and encourage further development of technologies.

The purpose of the MSM blood donor deferral is to help reduce the risk of transmitting human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis B (HBV), and hepatitis C (HCV) via blood components. The scientific basis for the deferral addresses the fact that the prevalence and incidence of HIV is considerably higher in the MSM population than in the general population. This is based on public health surveillance data published by the Public Health Agency of Canada, which has found that 48.8 percent of all reported HIV cases in

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adults were attributed to the MSM exposure category. The report is available at [http://healthy Canad ians.gc.ca/publications/diseases-conditions-maladies-affectations/hiv-aids-surveillance-2014-vih-sida/index-eng.php](http://healthy Canadians.gc.ca/publications/diseases-conditions-maladies-affectations/hiv-aids-surveillance-2014-vih-sida/index-eng.php).

In Canada, every blood donation is tested for a number of infectious diseases, including HIV, HBV, and HCV. Despite the advances in blood testing, donor screening and deferral remains a relevant safety measure as it prevents infected units of blood from entering the system, which is safer than retrieving an infected unit once it has been introduced. A combination of donor testing and screening measures is necessary to safeguard Canada's blood system. This combination has been highly effective, with no cases of HIV transmission by blood transfusion in over 25 years in Canada.

The Government of Canada appreciates all individuals and their families who contribute to saving lives every day through their blood and organ donations. Through our efforts over the years, Canada continues to have one of the safest blood systems in the world. Canadians' access to safe blood for themselves and their families has been the cornerstone of Health Canada's response to the Krever Commission of Inquiry on the Blood System in Canada.

CBS is looking at ways to allow more MSM to donate blood while maintaining the safety of the blood supply. For further information, please visit <https://blood.ca/en/msm/about-men-who-have-sex-with-men> and <https://www.hema-quebec.qc.ca/sang/donneur-sang/puis-je-donner/homme-ayant-eu-une-relation-sexuelle-avec-un-homme.en.html>.

Please be assured that the Government of Canada is committed to developing a long-term vision for blood services that ensures safety and non-discrimination in donation policies.

Again, thank you for writing.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ginette Petitpas Taylor". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "G" and "T".

The Honourable Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P.