About HIV Scotland
HIV Scotland is the national HIV policy organisation for Scotland. We exist on behalf of all those living with and at risk of HIV to ensure that Scotland has responsive policies, quality services and a supportive environment that enable people living with or at risk of HIV in Scotland to live healthy and fulfilling lives.

Statistics about HIV in Scotland
- As of 31st December 2016, there are 5,277 people diagnosed as living with HIV in Scotland, with the highest number of new diagnoses within Greater Glasgow and Clyde, and Lothian.¹
- It’s estimated that one in six people living with HIV in Scotland are unaware of their status. ²
- There were 285 new cases of HIV were reported in 2016. ³ This represents the first significant drop (approximately 20%) in new cases for over a decade.
- One in six people living with a diagnosed HIV infection in the UK is now aged 55 years and over.⁴

Existing blood donation rules
The absolute priority for blood donation is to ensure that there is a reliable, safe supply of blood and that all decisions around donors are based on the most recent scientific evidence available. The public must have unwavering confidence in the blood supply.

- In 2011, the permanent exclusion of men who have had sex with men from donating blood was replaced with a 12-month fixed period deferral from the latest relevant sexual contact following an evidence based review by the Advisory Committee on the Safety of Blood, Tissues and Organs (SaBTO). A 12 month deferral period also exists for the following:
  - Women who have had sex with a man who has ever previously had oral or anal sex with another man, even if they used a condom or other protective.
  - A partner who has ever received money or drugs for sex.
  - A partner who has ever injected or been injected with drugs.
  - A partner who has been sexually active in parts of the world with high rates of HIV.

- An indefinite ban remains in place for groups including:
  - They think they need a HIV or hepatitis test.
  - They are HIV, HTLV (human T cell lymphotropic virus), hepatitis B or hepatitis C positive.

¹ Health Protection Scotland, HIV infection and AIDS in Scotland: HIV infection and AIDS: Quarterly report to 31 December 2016
² Why Get Tested, HIV Testing Week Scotland
They have ever received money or drugs for sex.
- They have ever injected or been injected with drugs.

**Review of current rules**

HIV Scotland has previously called for a review of the 12 month deferral period; we believe that the existing rules do not take into account advances in HIV screening which is now effective at six weeks from exposure. We welcomed the establishment of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Blood Donation at the UK Parliament, in particular as a means of exploring the most recent evidence available, and engaging and hearing expertise from HIV organisations.

Whilst there has been no official statement, we note with interest that there has been speculation that SaBTO will recommend a reduction of the deferral period to three months for MSM. This reduction in deferral time would better account for the advances in HIV screening, however it is unclear at this time whether there will be any changes in the lifetime ban on former sex workers and people who have previously injected drugs.

This potential significant reduction in referral time is a welcome step in the right direction. It should be noted that this does not change the fact that all MSM, who have had oral or anal sex in the previous three months, are treated as high-risk.

**What’s now needed?**

**Introduction of new SaBTO recommendations**

In a similar approach taken to changes made following the 2011 SaBTO review, we call on the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service to fully implement the new SaBTO recommendations when they are announced during the summer of 2017. Should the recommendations include a reduction in the deferral period for MSM, this should be done in conjunction with active efforts to inform those communities for whom a change will affect most, in order to bring forward new eligible donors.

**Regular review of eligibility criteria**

To ensure that donation rules are evidence based, HIV Scotland believes there should be a periodic review of donation criteria. The regular review of relevant evidence is required to ensure that donation rules reflect the most recent evidence available, the blood supply is safe and criteria are free from unnecessary exclusions. Points to be considered include:

- Is it still necessary to treat all MSM as high risk?
- Is it still necessary to permanently exclude former sex workers?*
- Is it still necessary to permanently exclude people who have previously but no longer inject drugs?*

*Of those who have tested negative for blood borne viruses.

---

5 Government set to overhaul blood donation rules for men who have sex with men, PinkNews, 2017
Examine possibilities of an individual-risk based system
In line with the objectives of the petition, HIV Scotland would support further exploration by the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service, in collaboration with other stakeholders, including academics and the third sector, to determine if an individual risk-based system would be workable in Scotland. This would ensure that both donors and recipients had the confidence in a system that is grounded in public safety and did not unnecessarily exclude donations.