

Gay Men Still Unable To Donate Blood One Year After Pulse

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It's been about a year since a gunman killed 49 people in Orlando's Pulse Night Club – a popular spot among members of the lesbian, gay bisexual, and transgender community. After the incident, people lined up to give blood, and gay men pushed for the right to help their friends. 12 months later, a Food and Drug administration rule preventing sexually active gay men from giving blood still stands.



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Late in 2015 the FDA expunged its lifetime ban allowing gay men to donate with one restriction, they have to be celibate for 12 months. Florida State University Clinical Medicine Professor Doctor Jonathan Applebaum says this FDA policy perpetuates a stigma that gay men have HIV and AIDS.

“I really think there’s a stigma about HIV and there is a lot of fear about it. There is really no scientific basis for this. All of the blood that is donated is screened for infectious diseases, including HIV,” Applebaum said.

In the wake of the Pulse shooting, the FDA announced it would pursue more research regarding its current policy but David Stacy, with the human rights campaign says the research is already there.

“Our belief and our understanding of the existing science here in the United States as well as in Europe is that a full year ban on gay men is not necessary to protect the blood supply,” Stacy said.

670 people responded to FDA’s request for public comment after the Pulse shooting, including, blood donors, blood recipients, HIV physicians, advocacy groups, and academic and research institutions. The Office of Blood Research and Review’s Jennifer Scharpf presented the results in an April meeting of the Blood Products Advisory Committee.

“517 comments were against further change in the deferral policy. 86 comments were in support in further change in the deferral policy and this includes one petition with 300 signatures. 35 comments were not responsive to the request for comments, and 32 of the comments provided were responsive to the specific questions posed in the notice,” Scharpf said

Meanwhile, the FDA is considering other assessments. Doctor David Hardy of Whitman-Walker Health hopes the FDA will take a look at assessing people individually.

“We also submitted a detailed but simple four step plan in a trial that can be conducted to be able to test the adequacy of an improved deferral individual-based sort of donor questionnaire,” Hardy said.

And Hardy’s plan is included in the list of the FDA’s possible next steps along with analyzing the effects of the 12 month deferment policy.