

MSM (Men who have Sex with Men) and donating blood

The blood transfusion service in the UK changed its own policy on MSM donation in 2011 and introduced a 12 month deferral rather than a lifelong ban as in many other countries. This year, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have changed their policies in line with the UK.

Isle of Man positional statement

In 2014, we decided that expert opinion would be required in order to make an evidence based recommendation to the DHSC. Professor William Murphy, Director of the Irish National Blood Transfusion Service, was invited to visit the IOM to offer advice. Specific terms of reference were put forward by the then IOM Director of Public Health, namely:

- A review of the existing criteria for being a blood donor in Isle of Man and the basis for this.
- An examination of the evidence concerning the increased risk of infection created by Isle of Man bringing its policy in line with the UK as regards MSM
- The implications of status quo versus amending the policy
- To make recommendations to the Health Minister as regards the criteria for blood donation in Isle of Man.

Professor Murphy undertook this visit in late 2014 and met with various stakeholders at IOM DHSC including the CEO, Hospital Manager, Clinical Director for Diagnostics, Head of Blood Transfusion, and Pathology Manager. His main recommendation was that as the IOM BTS is not regulated by the Medicines and Health Care Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) then it is imperative to first obtain evidence that the IOM blood bank was comparable in terms of safety and processes to the UK. To this end, it was arranged for an ex MHRA inspector (Barbara Morris), to undertake a full analysis of the Isle of Man services in August 2015.

Her report, although stating that the processes used on the Isle of Man were very good, outlined a number of issues that would prevent us fully meeting MHRA standards. We have put plans into action in order to address these matters, but it is seen as a process that may take a number of years before we can achieve full compliance. In the meantime, because we cannot fully benchmark our services against the UK NHSBT, it is felt unwise to change our donor selection criteria at this time.

This is not a final position for the Isle of Man, but is a basis for further work to be carried out.