

Donating blood as an LGBTIQA+ person

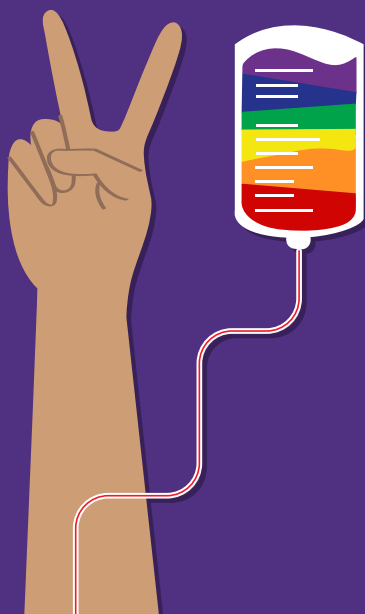


Rainbow Inclusion

Your very rainbow and disability friendly place

Donating blood as an LGBTIQ+ person

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Why should I donate blood?

Donating blood can save lives. Each time someone donates blood, it can save between one (1) and three (3) people's lives.

Australia needs lots of healthy people to donate blood regularly. We need blood to make sure that we always have enough blood when and where it is needed.

The donated blood is given to people who are unwell or have some health conditions. It is also given to people when there has been a medical emergency and they have been bleeding a lot.

Australian Red Cross Lifeblood is the organisation that takes and cares for blood donations in Australia.

'Donate' means to give freely. When you donate blood, you give a small part of your blood to help other people.

A **'Donor'** is a person who donates blood.



There are lots of places that you can donate blood.
Go to www.lifeblood.com.au/donor-centre to find a centre near you.

What happens when you donate blood?

Australian Red Cross Lifeblood is the organisation that takes and cares for blood donations. They have a lot of rules they follow to make sure that the blood is safe to use. They also have rules that help keep donors safe.



When you go to give your blood, make sure that you:



Look after yourself and are feeling healthy and well



Drink a lot of water



Have had a lot to eat



Have had a good sleep the night before



Bring identification (ID) that has your photo, full name, where you live, birthdate, and signature.

When you arrive at a Lifeblood Donor Centre, you will be asked to fill out a form on a tablet. These forms have a lot of questions for you to answer.

The law says that you need to be able to answer the questions on your own. If you cannot answer the questions on your own, you will not be able to donate your blood.

There are questions about your medical and health history, including any medicines you are currently taking. There are also questions about your lifestyle, including where you have been to, or if you have been to certain countries or places.

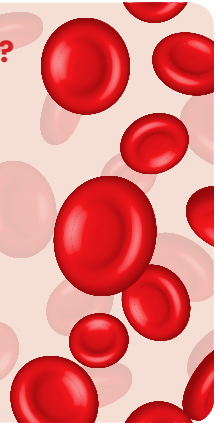
Some of the questions that are asked are very personal questions. There are questions about your sex life. You might feel uncomfortable answering these. These questions are there to make sure that it is safe for you to give blood, and safe for your blood to be used.

One of the Lifeblood staff members will ask you into a private room to talk about your answers. They will also check your blood pressure and your haemoglobin. These are checked every time that a person donates blood. **Only you and a Lifeblood staff member can be in this room.** They will answer any of your questions, and explain anything that you do not understand. They do this to make sure that they understand all of your answers.

Any personal information or answers you have given will be kept private and not shared with anyone else.

What is Haemoglobin?

Haemoglobin is a part of your blood that helps us feel healthy and well. It helps carry oxygen that we breathe in all around our body.



You can bring someone with you to help you read the forms, but you have to answer the questions yourself.

If you do not want your support person to know your answers, you can ask them to wait somewhere else while you answer.

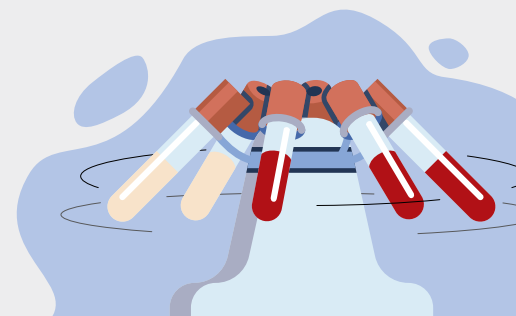
Why do they need to know about my sexual activities?

Donating blood is an important gift to those who need it. Unfortunately, it can also give the patients who need it infections and make them sicker.

All blood donations are tested for infections before being used. They are tested for HIV, hepatitis B and C, syphilis, and other infections.

The test cannot always find very new infections. This is why Lifeblood asks questions about your sex life. It helps them find out if you are more likely to have an infection than other people.

Because of this, it is very important that you are honest when you answer their questions. The form is a legal document. This means that people can get in trouble if they are not honest.



I'm LGBTIQ+ and I want to donate blood... can I?

When donating blood, you will be asked some questions about any sexual activity you have had in the last three (3) months. These questions are:

- ▶ If you are a man, have you had oral or anal sex with another man (with or without a condom)?
- ▶ If you are a woman, have you had sex with a man who you think may have had oral or anal sex with another man (with or without a condom)?

If you answer 'yes' to either of these questions, you will have to wait some time before you can donate. They will tell you how long you have to wait.

The rules for Lifeblood say that '*men who have sex with men*' need to wait three (3) months from the last time they had sex with a man (oral or anal sex, with or without a condom) before they can donate.



Women who have sex with women do not need to wait before they can donate.

Lifeblood sometimes uses the words '*men who have sex with men*'.

'*Men who have sex with men*' are words used to talk about people with a range of different identities who share similar sexual behaviours.

'*Men who have sex with men*' covers a lot of groups of people. It can include people who see themselves as gay, bisexual, straight, or any number of sexualities and experiences of gender.



The LGBTIQ+ community and donating blood

LGBTIQ+ people in Australia have had some problems when wanting to donate blood in the past.

In the 1980s, a rule was made that men who have sex with men were not allowed to donate blood at all. This was because HIV/AIDS was new and they could not test every blood donation for it yet.

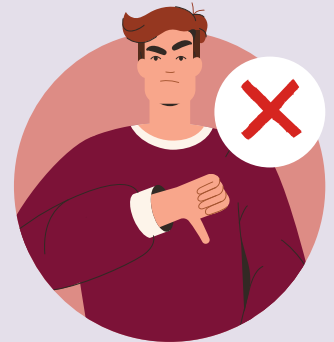
After a while, the ban was changed to a waiting period. A man would have to wait 1 year (12 months) since they last had sex with another man before they could donate.

The long wait has to donate has meant that gay, bisexual, or queer men have felt deeply and seriously like they have not been able to donate blood at all.

Recently, Australian Red Cross Lifeblood looked at the rules, listened to the community, and changed the rules to a three (3) month wait period. The new rules were approved by the Government, and the Therapeutic Goods Administration, who are in charge of all medicines and tests in Australia.

Many LGBTIQ+ people feel this is very unfair. There are groups in Australia that are working hard to make things better for LGBTIQ+ people who want to donate blood.

1980s



NOW

A change for plasma donation

Plasma is part of your blood that can be donated. A person can donate plasma every 2 weeks if they meet the Lifeblood rules.

Plasma can be used to help people who are bleeding a lot, or who are hurt badly. It is also used to make medicines that help people with cancer, people with kidney problems, people who have been burned badly, or other serious health issues. This makes plasma special.

After plasma is donated, it goes through some extra steps that make it safe to use. Lifeblood is working to change the wait times so that all people who want to donate plasma can donate. Lifeblood wants to make sure that the rules about sex and LGBTQA+ people does not matter for plasma donation. The government and the agency in charge of medicine need to agree before the rules change.

If the rules change, Lifeblood will tell everyone in the community.



The United Kingdom and Canada already let LGBTQA+ people donate blood in the same way as everyone else. Our countries have a lot in common. Many changes need to happen so that more Australians can donate blood.

What if I am taking PrEP?

PrEP is short for '*pre-exposure prophylaxis*'. It is a medicine that some HIV negative people take to prevent getting HIV.



The Lifeblood rules say that anyone who takes PrEP needs to wait three (3) months before donating plasma, and twelve (12) months before donating blood.

Lifeblood says that this is because some infections do not show up on tests when you are taking PrEP.

Any doctor in Australia can prescribe PrEP. It is on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), which makes some medicines more affordable. If you want to learn more about PrEP, you can speak with your doctor.

I am transgender. Can I donate blood?

Lifeblood welcomes any person that meets all of their rules to donate.

Lifeblood says that trans, non-binary, genderqueer, genderfluid, and agender people who want to donate are welcome to donate.

However, the forms that Lifeblood uses only lets people select 'male' or 'female' options when answering questions. This means that filling out the form could be upsetting for some gender diverse people. You should answer in a way that feels right for you.

When you have your interview with a nurse, you need to share that you are transgender. This is because there are some differences with blood donation between bodies that were born with 'male' or 'female' body parts. Lifeblood have these differences to make sure that you stay healthy while you donate. Hormone medication that you might be taking can also change who can use your blood after you have donated.

When donating blood, if you are transgender, you will also be asked:

'Within the last 3 months, have you had oral, anal or any other penetrative sex with a male, transgender or gender diverse partner?'

If you answer 'yes' to this question, you will have to wait for three (3) months before donating.

Lifeblood says these rules are in place because it is more likely for a transgender person to have HIV or a different infection in their blood.

Some of the rules that Lifeblood have around transgender donors use language that is confusing or not as clear as it could be. If you are unsure, you can ask a staff member to explain anything you do not understand.





I am intersex. Can I donate blood?

Yes. Any person that meets the Lifeblood rules can donate. Intersex people who want to donate are welcome.

Talking about my sex, gender, and body is really difficult for me. I am not sure what to tell Lifeblood.

The forms only need you to choose male or female when you want to donate. You do not have to tell Lifeblood that you are Intersex or about your body. You will need to tell them about medications you are on.

I am still not sure what I should answer on the form, what do I do?

Each person's body is different. If you are unclear or confused, and not sure how to answer, you could talk to someone to help you decide what is best for you. You could talk to:

- ▶ A doctor or medical professional that knows you and your body.
- ▶ A nurse or doctor from Lifeblood.
- ▶ A friend, family member, or support person that you trust.

Why do they stop some LGBTIQ+ people from donating blood?

The laws that Lifeblood follow are there because of the risk of an infection or virus being given to another person. A donor may not know they have an infection, or it may not be found by the testing.



Lifeblood has to follow this rule because research says that men who have sex with men have a much higher risk of getting HIV. This is why they use the three (3) month rule explained earlier.

Some people are not happy with this rule. They think that the rules are written in a way that thinks all LGBTIQ+ people act and behave the same. Some of the rules are not up-to-date with how the community thinks about LGBTIQ+ people. This can make LGBTIQ+ donors feel like they are treated unfairly.

Some LGBTIQ+ people say that the current rules about LGBTIQ+ are unfair and wrong. Just.equal, a national LGBTIQ+ advocacy organisation, wants the wait times to be stopped. They want a better set of questions that ask people about each different person's behaviour and risk of having an infection.

How can I tell the Australian Red Cross Lifeblood how I feel?

If you want to contact the Australian Red Cross Lifeblood service to ask a question, or speak to someone about giving blood, you can contact them by calling 13 14 95.

If you want to tell Australian Red Cross Lifeblood what you think about their LGBTIQA+ rules, or to make a complaint, you can contact them online at www.lifeblood.com.au/contact

You can also contact the Australian Red Cross Lifeblood on social media.



13 14 95



www.lifeblood.com.au/contact



@lifebloodau



facebook.com/lifebloodau

Where this information has come from?

just.equal

Join Our Blood Donation Declaration of Australian Doctors, Nurses and Medical Professionals

 www.equal.org.au/blood_donation

Australian Red Cross Lifeblood

I'm transgender. Can I donate?

 www.lifeblood.com.au/faq/eligibility/lifestyle-and-identity/transgender


Australian Red Cross Lifeblood

Sexual activity

 www.lifeblood.com.au/blood/eligibility/sexual-activity


The Gender Centre

Three mistakes the Australian Red Cross makes about TGD people and one reason it's still important to donate blood.

 <https://gendercentre.org.au/polare-magazines/item/three-mistakes-the-australian-red-cross-makes-about-tgd-people-and-one-reason-its-still-important-to-donate-blood>

Federal Register of Legislation

Therapeutic Goods (Standard for Human Cell and Tissue Products—Donor Screening Requirements) (TGO 108) Amendment Order 2022

 <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2022L00284>

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This booklet was written by people from the Information for Inclusion project team. This project is paid for by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) ILC Program. The project team includes LGBTIQ+ people with intellectual disability, researchers, community health experts, and project managers.

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 INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH
TRANSFORMATION



From our hearts, we acknowledge the First People of Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We show our respects to Elders past, present and future and to Mums and Dads, Aunties, Uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews and family. Brotherboys and Sistergirls are part of the rainbow flag.

For all the self advocates who are people with intellectual disability: Nothing about us without us.



Point your phone's camera at this QR code to visit the **Rainbow Inclusion** website