

Blood Donation Eligibility Among Men who have Sex with Men in Australia

Mowat Y¹, McGregor S¹, Masser B³, Heywood A², Hoad V⁴, Thorpe R⁵, McManus H¹, Kaldor J¹, Haire B¹
¹The Kirby Institute, University of New South Wales, Sydney, ²School of Public Health and Community medicine, University of New South Wales, Sydney, ³School of Psychology, The University of Queensland, ⁴Australian Red Cross Lifeblood, Perth, ⁵Australian Red Cross Lifeblood, Melbourne

Introduction

In 2021, blood donation criteria in Australia changed for men who have sex with men (MSM), such that MSM became eligible if their most recent male-to-male sex event was at least 3 months prior to donation (previously 12 months).

It is not known how many non heterosexual men may be eligible to donate blood under the new criterion, nor how many may be eligible if the deferral was removed all together.

Aims

To determine:

1. How many non-heterosexual men may be eligible to donate blood under the 3-month criterion.
2. How many MSM may be eligible to donate blood if the deferral was removed all together.
3. Knowledge of the MSM blood donation criteria among non-heterosexual men.

Methods

A cross-sectional national population survey was conducted via a probability-based online panel. The survey included questions on eligibility, including the new MSM criterion, and questions to assess knowledge of the MSM deferral period.

All respondents were aged over 18 and living in Australia.

Results

A total of 5,178 people completed the survey, with 42.9% male (n=2,222), 56.6% female (2,928), 0.4% non-binary (n=23), and 0.06% who use a different term (n=3).

Conclusion

Just under one quarter of the self-identified non-heterosexual men were eligible under current criteria. If the 3-month MSM deferral was removed entirely, this would result in 1.8% more men being eligible to donate blood. Should this survey be an accurate representation of the Australian population, this equates to an additional 168,753 men aged 18-79 years old being eligible to donate blood. Knowledge of the current MSM criterion is low among non-heterosexual men, indicating a need for improved public health messaging in this area.

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Of the men, 91% (n=2021) identified as heterosexual, 4.3% (n=96) identified as gay, 2% (n=44) identified as bisexual, 0.4% (n=8) said they use a different term, 0.63% (n=14) said they do not know and 1.76% (n=39) refused to answer. Of the non-binary respondents, 30.4% (n=7) identified as gay or lesbian, 26.1% (n=6) identified as bisexual, 17.4% (n=4) said they use a different term.

In response to "In the last 3 months have you had male-to-male sex?", 3.9% of respondents (n=86) who identified as male answered yes, including 7 heterosexually identified men (see Figure 1). Of those who had male-to-male sex within the last 3 months, 45.4% (n=39) were otherwise eligible to donate blood, based on criteria assessed in the survey.

Of the self-identified non-heterosexual men (n=148), 44.6% (n=66) had not had male-to-male sex in the last 3 months, and 24.3% (n=36) were eligible to donate blood based on criteria assessed in the survey.

Only 16.9% (n=25) of self-identified non-heterosexual men knew that the deferral period after male-to-male sex is 3 months, and 32.4% (n=48) said they did not know. 40.5% (n=60) believed the deferral period was longer, with 16.2% (n=24) believing the deferral is still 12 months (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. In the last 3 months, have you had male-to-male sex? (%)

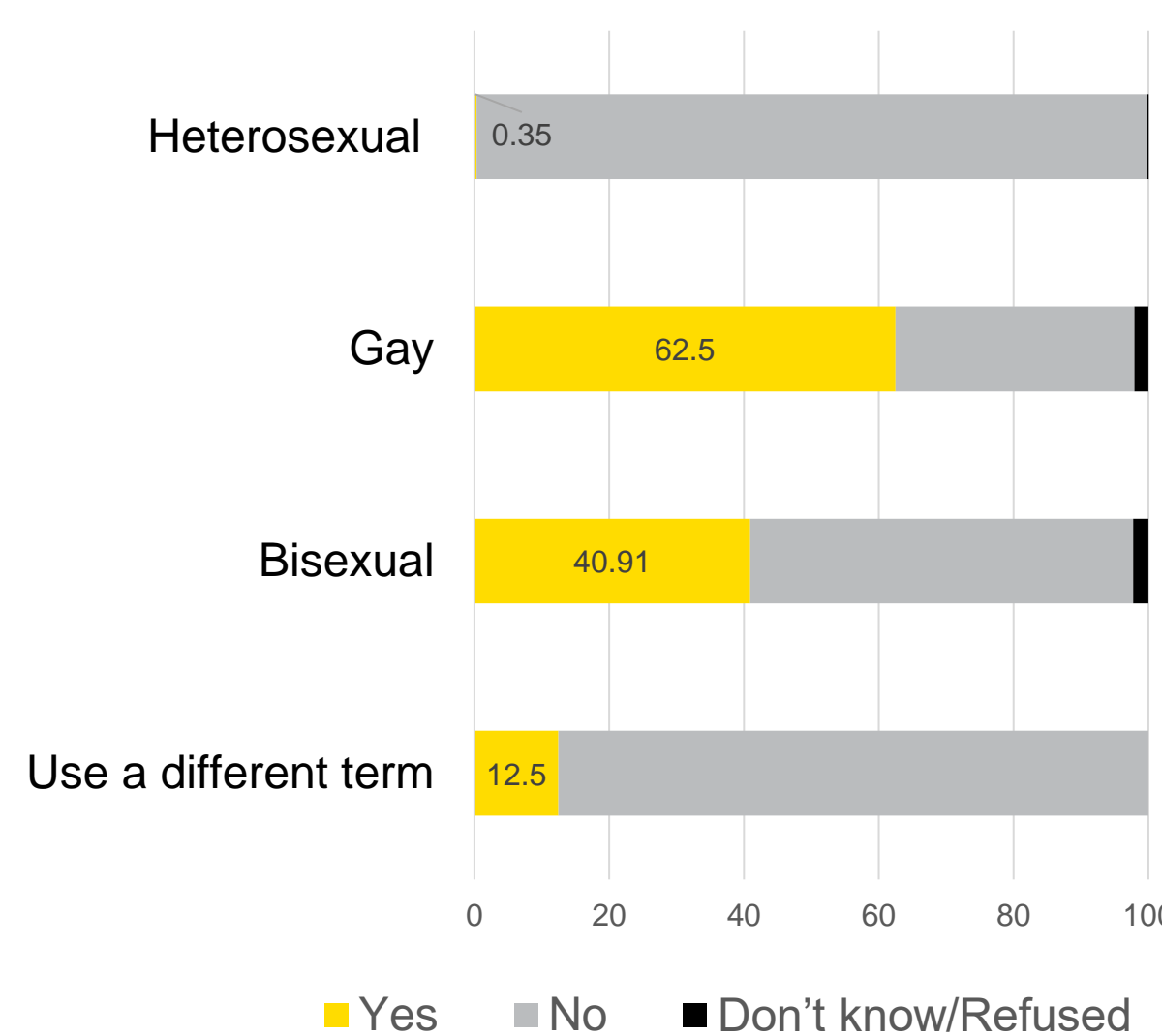


Figure 2. How long do you think the deferral period is after having male-to-male sex? (%)

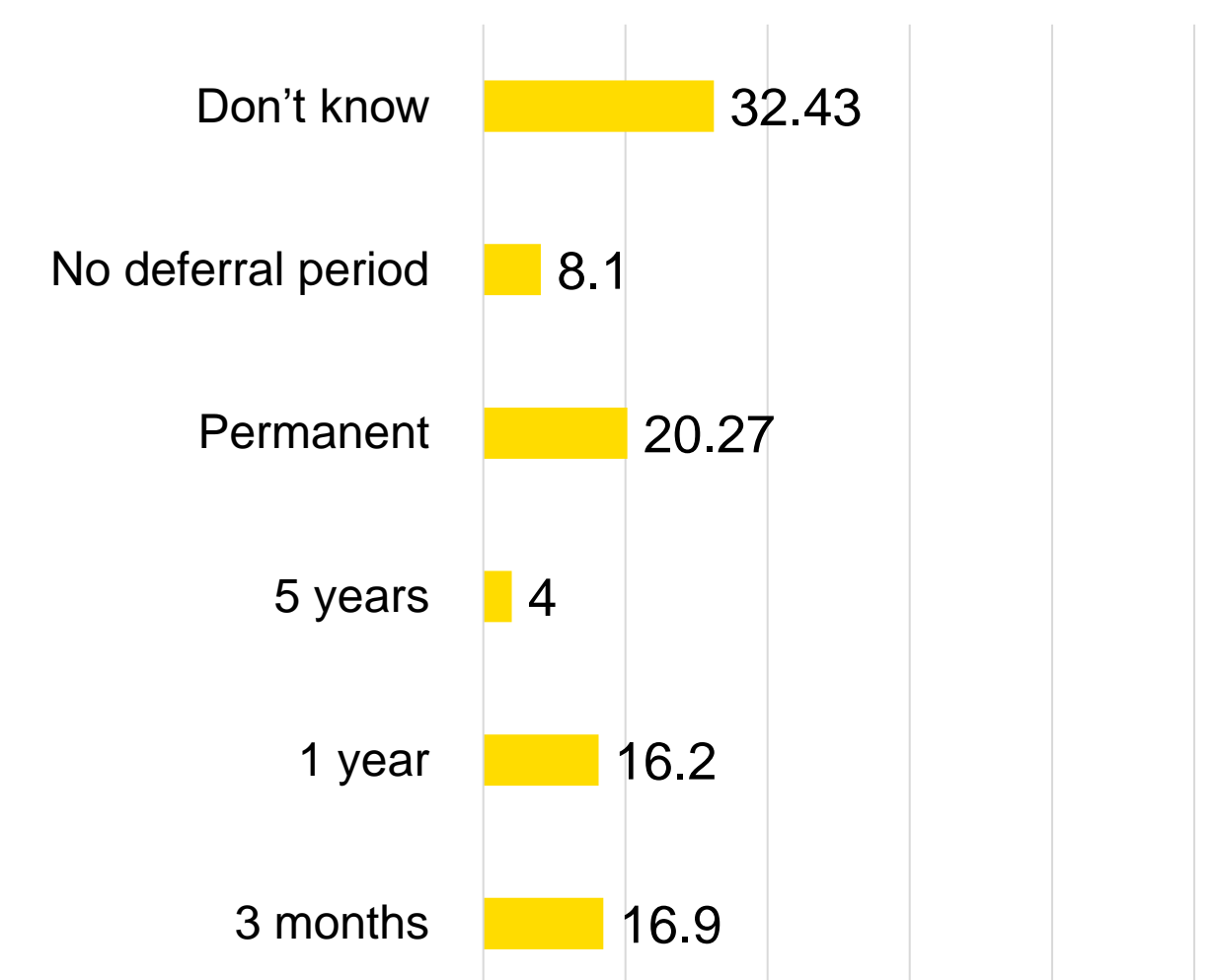


Table 1. Eligibility among males

Sexuality (male gender)	Eligible	Ineligible	Would be eligible without the 3 month MSM deferral
Heterosexual	58.5% (n=1183)	41.5% (n=838)	58.6% (n=1185)
Gay	15.6% (n=15)	84.4% (n=81)	44.8% (n=43)
Bisexual	40.9% (n=18)	59.1% (n=26)	63.6% (n=28)
Use a different term	37.5% (n=3)	62.5% (n=5)	37.5% (n=3)
Total	55.9% (n=1241)	44.15% (n=981)	57.7% (n=1281)

Contact details:

Yasmin Mowat

Email: ymowat@kirby.unsw.edu.au

Phone: 0487 437 924

Website: <https://kirby.unsw.edu.au/project/blood-donor-survey>