



American Red Cross

American Red Cross Position Statement to the Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy (TSE) Committee

The safety of the blood supply is paramount and is the American Red Cross's number one priority. The Red Cross and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) believe it was a prudent step to ensure blood safety by deferring blood donors who have traveled to or lived in the United Kingdom based on the theoretical risk of vCJD and the lack of a blood screening test.

The current deferral is for people who have traveled to or resided in the United Kingdom (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Isle of Man or the Channel Islands) for 6 months or more between 1980 and 1996. The American Red Cross supports expanding this deferral to include France as well as all of Western Europe given the growing evidence of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) in those countries. We believe the Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy (TSE) committee should consider a further tightening of the deferral period to less than six months in the U.K. We also believe the committee should examine extending the exposure period between 1980 to the present, instead of the current deferral between 1980 and 1996.

There is evidence in animal models that TSE is transmissible through blood. We must be cautious to ensure the safety of America's blood supply for vulnerable patients.

The American Red Cross calls for expanded research to better understand TSE pathogens and to create a TSE-specific blood screening test. We believe that if this is done, in the next two to three years we will have a means to assess the true risk, which will better inform our donor selection criteria.

We estimate that expanding the deferral criteria would reduce the current number of Red Cross blood donors in the range of 5 to 6 percent. Therefore, it is our shared obligation to embark on a sustained national campaign to educate the public to increase the number of American blood donors.

The American Red Cross knows it will take a major investment of time, money and resources to attract new donors and retain current donors to meet the increasing needs of patients nationwide. We are prepared to take on this public responsibility along with others who share our mission to ensure a safe and available blood supply.

The Red Cross is prepared to implement tightened donor criteria across our national system.