

ARCBS DONOR POLICY FACT SHEET

RESIDENCY IN THE UK BETWEEN 1980 AND 1996

This fact sheet provides information concerning the Australian Red Cross Blood Service (ARCBS) donor deferral policies, particularly with respect to residency in the United Kingdom (UK) between 1980 and 1996.

The relevant **eligibility criteria** for donors are listed on the Frequently Asked Questions page. Anyone who has lived in the UK for a total period of 6 months or more between 1980 and 1996 is permanently deferred from donating blood.

Although the number of cases of variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease [vCJD] (the human form of 'mad cow disease' or bovine spongiform encephalopathy) in the United Kingdom is declining, in the absence of a screening test, the full extent of exposure is not known. Since 2004, there have been a small number of reported cases of patients in the UK diagnosed with vCJD who have been infected through blood transfusion.

Based on this information, and in the absence of a reliable screening test for vCJD in blood, the Australian Red Cross Blood Service has implemented guidelines to reduce the risk of vCJD transmission through blood transfusion in Australia. Currently we exclude people from donating who:

- Have resided in the UK between 1 January 1980 and 31 December 1996 for a total (cumulative) period of 6 months or more, or
- Have received blood transfusions in the UK since 1 January 1980.

Unfortunately, because of the extensive time period covered by the deferral and the possibility of unknowing exposure to beef or beef products, it is not possible to exempt vegetarians who have resided in the UK for a cumulative period of six months or more during the risk years.

The Australian Red Cross Blood Service is monitoring progress in the development of a reliable blood screening test for vCJD. Should this deferral policy be changed for any reason, please be assured that this information will be disseminated widely.

We acknowledge that potential blood donors can be disappointed by their deferral as a result of this policy. However, deferral of donors in this case is based on the need for ARCBS to ensure the highest possible safety in blood and blood products.

Our community demands, and is entitled to, the safest possible blood supply and our actions are focused on delivering sufficient and safe blood to all who require it.