US eases blood donation limits for gay men due to shortage

By MATTHEW PERRONE
AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP)—The U.S. government Thursday eased restrictions on blood donations from gay men and other key groups because of a drop in the nation’s blood supply triggered by the coronavirus outbreak.

The Food and Drug Administration’s new policy aims to allow tens of thousands more Americans to give blood, including gay and bisexual men and people with recent tattoos and piercings.

“We want and we need healthy people—all healthy people—to give blood,” said Surgeon General Dr. Jerome Adams, who announced the changes in a media briefing with the FDA.

Canceled blood drives have decimated donations to the American Red Cross and other nonprofits that provide most of the blood supply. Last month, the Red Cross estimated there had been 86,000 fewer blood donations in recent weeks because blood drives were canceled at workplaces, colleges and other locations.

The FDA’s previous rules barred donations from men who have had sex with a man in the previous year. The same policy applied to women who’ve had sex with gay or bisexual men and people who’ve received tattoos and piercings in the past year.

Under the new policy, the disqualifying time period was reduced to three months. FDA officials said the move to three months matches recent changes in the United Kingdom and other developed countries.

The FDA on Thursday made similar changes to restrictions for people who have recently traveled to countries where malaria exposure is a risk.

The agency said it expects the changes to remain in place after the COVID-19 outbreak.

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic that is shaking our world, I spoke with several different LGBTQ families recently to see how they’re handling the crisis, what their challenges are, and where they’re finding strength.

Emphasizing Gratitude

Mark Loewen, a children’s author in Virginia, is trying to balance “being honest about what’s going on” with only giving his 8-year-old daughter “as much information as she needs to have” at her age. He and his husband Leo are trying not to talk in front of her about their worries. “The news never plays loud in the house,” he said.

They attempt to be honest about their feelings, however. “We also try to notice when our frustration is escalating, so we can take a break to breathe and restart,” he explained.

Sometimes, though, after a day of working from home, “When it’s finally time for her, we are completely drained,” he said. They then seek to find a compromise activity that everyone will enjoy.

At the end of each day, though, they list things they were grateful for. “They might be little things,” he said. “But we want to remember to stay grateful for what we have and maintain a positive perspective.”

He reflected, “It’s not magical, it’s not really beautiful, but we’re doing our best and we will be all right.”

Sandra, a queer parent who asked not to use her last name, lives in Philadelphia with her partner, their two kids, ages 7 and 9, and her father-in-law, 75. She said that although things are good now, “It was hard for the kids

Boston Pride Events Postponed

Boston Pride and City of Boston Announce Postponement to 2021

Submitted by Boston Pride

Boston Pride and the City of Boston announced today that annual Pride events scheduled for June 2020 will be postponed to June 2021 due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The new date for the Boston Pride Parade and Festival is Saturday, June 12, 2021. The joint decision was made due to the concern of the health and wellbeing of the community and others. Boston Pride is commemorating its 50th anniversary during 2020 through 2021 to celebrate social, legal, and political successes, the LGBTQ culture and community—while continuing to work for social justice and human rights.

“I know this was a very hard decision to make and I know it’s very hard new to hear, but it’s the right decision. As we fight the coronavirus pandemic, everyone’s safety and health is our top priority,” said Mayor Martin J. Walsh. “To our LGBTQ community, we may not be able to celebrate Boston Pride 50th Anniversary this summer, but once we are able, we’ll have the biggest and strongest Pride to date. The partnership between Boston Pride and the City of Boston has never been stronger, and I look forward to joining everyone to commemorate the many years of fighting for equality.”

“Our foremost concern is for the health, safety, and wellbeing of the LGBTQ community and allies. We cannot afford to put anyone at risk. There will be time to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Boston Pride and recognize not only the struggles that our community has faced over the years, but also celebrate our strength and resiliency which we all need during this difficult time,” said Linda J. DiMarco, President of Boston Pride.

“We appreciate the City of Boston’s support of our community during this difficult time.”

Boston Pride is focusing on maintaining communication with its year-round volunteers who plan and execute its events and programming, sharing resources for LGBTQ people, and working alongside community partners who need support during this time. Boston Pride will continue to develop programming to commemorate its 50th anniversary and to connect with the community leading up to Pride events in 2021. Look for events that will include conversations with different leaders throughout the Pride movement, a series of photographs and images, and other virtual events. Programming announcements will be made on the Boston Pride website and social media platforms.

“These are challenging times for all”

Wyoming court to rule on birth certificate gender changes

Source: AP—AP Wire Service

The Wyoming Supreme Court is expected to rule on a case that would determine whether transgender residents can change the genders on their birth certificates. The case could decide if the Laramie County District Court has jurisdiction to recognize a change of sex by a transgender woman. The Wyoming Tribune Eagle reported Sunday.

The high court is also expected to decide whether the jurisdiction would comply with state statute and rules for the Wyoming Department of Health. The woman, identified only by the initials M.H., filed to have her name and gender legally changed in April 2019.

The state health department said the request required a court ruling. A Laramie district court judge said Wyoming birth certificates identify a person’s sex, not gender, and denied the petition because of a lack of jurisdiction.

"Although self-isolating may at times be hard, many people of all faiths—and of none—are discovering that it presents an opportunity to slow down, pause and reflect in prayer or meditation."

— Queen Elizabeth II, as part of her coronavirus address. Talk about inclusive!
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The district court filed a brief arguing the Wyoming Legislature has not given the court the power to issue a gender change order, but the health department’s rules allow the sex on a birth certificate to be amended.

“The court said it ‘could not usurp the power of the legislature to create statutory authority where the legislature did not establish.’”

The woman’s lawyer said the district court left them in a “Catch-22” situation, and they hope the Supreme Court appeal will allow her to proceed.

“I’m representing a transgender woman who is exercising her rights under Wyoming law,” attorney George Powers said. "The statutes and law required her to get a court order to exercise those rights.”

The Legislature has not kept pace with changes affecting gender and vital statistics, said Democratic state Rep. Sara Burlingame, who noted some statutes have been on the books since Wyoming gained statehood.

“That law no longer fits in 2020,” Burlingame said. “We have wholly different issues.”

Current Wyoming law does not contain language recognizing same-sex marriage or recognize women can be police officers or firefighter.

Burlingame said, “You think a women never put a fire out?”

Burlingame said she hopes to bring future legislation to address gender issues in the law.

“We’re just doing what we’ve always done in Wyoming, which is stick up for our neighbors,” Burlingame said. “We don’t need to agree on all the particulars. We just take care of each other.”

Idaho governor signs into law anti-transgender legislation

By KEITH RIDLER
Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP)—Idaho Gov. Brad Little on Monday signed into law two anti-transgender bills, making Idaho the first among states that introduced some 40 such bills this year to enact them.

The Republican governor approved legislation that prohibits transgender people from changing the sex listed on their birth certificates, and another that bans transgender girls and women from competing in women’s sports.

The birth certificate measure ignores a 2018 federal court ruling that a past law barring transgender people from making birth certificate changes violated the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution. The judge scrapped the ban and warned against new rules. The Idaho attorney general’s office, which didn’t appeal the ruling, said it could cost $1 million if the state had to defend the ban again and lost.

“There’s an injunction that already absolutely forbids this policy, and the government can’t enforce this law without violating a court order,” said Peter Renn of Lambda Legal, the law firm that represented two transgender women whose lawsuit led to...
The sports ban applies to all sports teams sponsored by public schools, colleges and universities. A girls’ or women’s team will not be open to transgender students who identify as female.

Backers said the law was needed because transgender female athletes have physical advantages. Opponents said it discriminated against transgender girls and women, and would subject athletes to invasive tests to prove their gender, likely causing some potential athletes to avoid sports.

Republican Rep. Barbara Ehardt, who sponsored the sports ban, has consistently argued that allowing the practice would negate Title IX, the 1972 law barring sex discrimination in education and is credited with opening up athletic competition for girls and women.

She didn’t return a call from The Associated Press on Monday.

Both the anti-transgender bills had overwhelming support among Republicans in the House and Senate in numbers great enough to override a veto. Rather than wait out a potential veto, though, both chambers adjourned earlier this month because of coronavirus concerns and would have been powerless to override vetoes.

“We condemn Governor Little’s actions and the actions of dozens of Idaho legislators who are so focused on pleasing their bigoted base instead of doing what is right,” said Mistie Tolman, Idaho director for Planned Parenthood Votes Northwest and Hawaii, adding the laws make Idaho one of the only states with anti-transgender laws.

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at first,” since they wanted to have play dates and go to the playground.

They are forming connections with others in new ways. “They have had more FaceTime conversations with family and even read their toddler cousins a book today on FaceTime,” she related. “We also go for socially distant walks and people are saying hello more that we are used to in this city.”

“It’s been harder with my father-in-law,” she admitted. “He really enjoyed trips to the corner store and wants us to believe he can go out to ‘get essentials.’”

He admitted, “All of our screen time restrictions are out the window. And that’s okay, They’ll be fine.”

For support, he said, he’s been reaching out to other LGBTQ parents “and especially other single parent friends.” He’s also been connecting with members of his LGBTQ-friendly church via Zoom video conferencing and getting to know the community “in a completely different and more intimate way.”

After the pandemic is over, though, he said, “We’ll be excited to see our queer family community together again. The next Rainbow Family Camp is going to be amazing.”

Dawn Ennis, a transgender parent in Connecticut, lives with her 13- and 17-year-old high schoolers as well as her 21-year-old, home from college because of the pandemic. “We’ve adapted to the new normal,” she said. “We’re reading more. We’re doing yard work and house cleaning, and—for the moment—we have a full pantry and enough toilet paper, tissues, and paper towels to last awhile.”

All her children have started or will soon start online classes. Ennis herself, who teaches at a nearby university, will be instructing virtually. “And I’ve got a plan to resurrect our vegetable and herb garden,” she said.

Yet COVID-19 is only one challenge this family has faced. Ennis’ wife, the children’s mother, died four years ago. “Grief doesn’t ever really go away,” Ennis said—but “Resilience is our superpower.”

Still, her oldest son’s presence “is a huge relief” for her and his siblings, she asserted. “He has been a tower of strength.” At the same time, she said, “He nonetheless has fears and anxiety of his own, and enjoys his solitude.”

He’s been finding escape in reality shows like Survivor. He prefers The Amazing Race, the world-spanning adventure competition “that would be impossible to hold now.” Still, she said, “So long as we don’t have to eat bugs”—a common challenge in both shows—“I have every confidence my team will win. We are nothing if not survivors.”

Family Separation

Cathy Renna, a communications consultant in New Jersey, shares custody of her 14-year-old daughter Rosemary with her ex, who lives in Texas. Rosemary had been scheduled to visit Renna over spring break in March—a trip now postponed indefinitely. She and her ex “had to make a hard decision,” Renna said. “But the most important thing is Rosemary’s safety.”

Rosemary’s usual July trip, too, is up in the air, and Renna now wonders, “When am I going to see her next?” While her current partner and extended family are “incredibly supportive,” Renna said, “The biggest source of anxiety is the uncertainty.” She explained, “I’m not anxious about whether my daughter is being well taken care of and safe, because I know she is. But it’s still really hard.”

They talk every day via Zoom, though, and Rosemary, a talented artist, shares her latest creations. Renna orders art supplies online to be shipped to Rosemary. “It’s not the same” as an in-person visit, she said, “but it’s definitely better than if we didn’t have it.”

Caring for Our Wider Communities

One parent in Florida, who asked to remain anonymous, told me that she and her wife “have been a regular part of the life of a seven-year-old girl” who lives nearby with her father and stepmother and plays with their own eight-year-old child. She said, “Her parents are addicts. Her dad just got out of jail for assaulting his current girl friend.” Her mom has lost custody. The girl often stays with the woman’s family all day on the weekends.

The woman adds, however, “I have severe asthma. My life quite possibly depends on me not getting COVID-19.” The girl has told her, however, that her dad and stepmom “don’t care” about taking precautions against the virus. The woman has had to tell her she can no longer visit. “She sits out in her driveway most of the day now and waves to me when she sees me. That makes me cry,” she related. “We’re going to figure out what we can do from a serious distance so she knows she’s still loved.”

And in a reminder that this is a worldwide pandemic, Luka wrote to me from New Zealand, noting, “I am technically not a parent yet,” but they help care for their housemate’s five-year-old child. Additionally, Luka is...
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the “cruelest states in the country.”

Across the U.S., more than 40 bills were introduced this year targeting transgender youth. About half, like one of the Idaho bills, sought to ban transgender girls from competing at various levels of girls’ sports. Another large batch of bills sought to ban certain types of gender-transition medical treatment for minors.

None of these bills have been enacted, and most have died. In some other states—including Ohio, Alabama, Tennessee, Kansas, Louisiana, South Carolina, Missouri and Arizona—bills of one or both categories remain technically alive, but most are considered unlikely to win final passage. In some cases, the legislatures are in recess and future scheduling is in limbo because of the coronavirus outbreak.

Meanwhile, the families of three female high school runners have filed a lawsuit in federal court seeking to block transgender athletes in Connecticut from participating in girls’ sports.

On March 24, the U.S. Justice Department came out in support of the lawsuit, arguing that the state’s inclusive policy violates the federal Title IX law allowing girls equal educational and athletic opportunities.

Associated Press writer David Crary in New York contributed to this report.

Blood

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pandemic ends.

The U.S. and many other countries have long restricted donations from gay and bisexual men and several other groups due to the risk of spreading HIV through the blood supply. In 2015, the FDA moved from a total ban to the one-year abstinence period for men who have sex with men.

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high school teacher, "so i am a queer person constantly around kids."

Luka is concerned about their queer students, who after school closures would be returning to homes "where there is often much less support than is provided at school."

For themselves, they said, "The hardest thing about COVID-19 is self-isolation. I’m already struggling as I am not able to see my queer friends as regularly.” They added, “I’m also worried about my is self-isolation. I’m already struggling as I am not able to see my friends."

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Luka also said that not knowing when they’ll be able to get a haircut makes their gender dysphoria worse, as does the fact that they will likely stop chest binding soon, “as a precautionary measure.” While there is no evidence that binding leads to a higher risk of COVID-19, some doctors have advised not binding if infected, to ease the respiratory effects of the disease.

Nevertheless, Luka said, “I’m appreciating the coming together of online communities, and the support that is providing at this uncertain time.”

Our Children, Building Community

Young people in LGBTQ families are among those stepping up to create those online communities. Bea Croteau is a high school sophomore in Massachusetts and a member of the school’s GSA (Gender and Sexuality Alliance). She and one of her two moms came up with the idea of asking a local college student, whose studies include queer history, to host a virtual discussion on the topic for the GSA. The other GSA leaders agreed. A lot of the GSA members love queer history, Croteau told me in an e-mail. For the online event, she said, “I hope they learn new things and are able to discuss ideas they already know and love.”

We are likely seeing only the beginning of COVID-19’s impact—and the people hardest hit are the ones least likely to have the time to talk with a reporter. The stories above are not meant to be a representative group, but simply to offer a few examples and perhaps offer some inspiration. LGBTQ families have always proven we can face adversity; these families are showing we can do it again even in the face of COVID-19.

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of Mombian (mombian.com), a GLAAD Media Award-winning blog and resource directory for LGBTQ parents.
In these unsettling times, there are few things I am sure of. But, if there is one thing I can say with absolute certainty, it's that Patti LuPone is insane. This is not new information to any LuPone devotee. But we now have video proof that could send her away for a long, long time. Her descent into madness coincides with the pandemic we are currently living through. People are looking for all sorts of ways to while away the hours, and Patti is no different. She decided to go on a social media blitz and give people a tour of her basement. This is no regular basement. There is a full-sized pinball machine, a jukebox, scores of photos capturing assorted theatrical souvenirs. These took up three videos. However, we’re focusing on the fourth. In that one, she wanders down the stairs in full Norma Desmond regalia—oh yes, complete with turban and sunglasses. “You there. Why are you so LATE!” she asks in her distinctive clipped cadence. As she sings “With One Look”, she wafts over to a slot machine—oh, did I mention she’s got a slot machine? Just check it out...on our website, naturally.

We are all doing what we can to entertain the masses. Even I, your beloved Billy, am doing twice-weekly LIVE telecasts from one of my many humble abodes. Tuesdays and Thursdays at 3PM Eastern, I can be found on YouTube, Facebook, and even BillyMasters.com under “TV”. We’ve had some fascinating revelations from various luminaries—the anecdotes of Charles Busch and Steve Knetko are required viewing. All free, all live, and all archived. Coming up this Tuesday, April 7th, Bruce Vilanch and Andrea Martin will regale us.

I would never want to make light of the coronavirus—it’s a bitch of a virus. And I’ve had my share of viruses. That said, Tuesday, April 7th, I’m posting it on BillyMasters.com and you can hear it for yourself—

When the fabulous Fran Fine (you know, Fran Drescher) teased that she had a surprise a-brewin’, I couldn’t have guessed this news. On Monday, April 6th, the original cast of “The Nanny” is getting together online to do a table reading of the pilot episode. Fran and her ex, Peter Marc Jacobson, said, “It’s a once in a lifetime Pandemic Performance for our fans around the world who are currently stressing in isolation and could use a real upset!” The only person who will not be appearing is James Marsden, who made a brief appearance in the original episode kissing Nicholle Tom. Fun fact—who knew I had something in common with James Marsden? I’ll save that story for another installment of “Billy Masters LIVE”!

Red Bull Theater was going to do a livestream reading of the play “To Pity She’s a Whore” with their 2015 cast to help fundraising efforts. While everyone was happy to participate for free, nobody thought to get the OK from Actors’ Equity Association—and the union threatened legal action if the show went on. So it was cancelled. AEA said (in part), “At a time when almost everyone in the arts is going without a regular paycheck and worries about their health care, it’s deeply sad to see that some employers will still ask Equity actors to work without the protections of a contract.” Here’s something to consider, Equity—if the theatre shuts down because they can’t raise money, that will lead to dozens of actors not being employed. Thanks!

On the flip side, Seth Rudetsky and James Wesley are continuing their fundraising efforts for the Actors Fund by doing play readings twice a week. They assembled Charles Busch, Richard Kind, Faith Prince and Andrea Martin for a reading of “The Tale of the Allegient’s Wife”. I was amused to note that at the end of this event, they thanked the Theatre Authority Inc, Actor’s Equity Association, the American Guild of Musical Artists, the American Guild of Variety Artists, and SAG/AFTRA. PHEW—that’s a whole lotta hoops they need! Or no, just stay on your fucking yacht instagramming. This is your only chance to go on a social media blitz and give people a tour of her basement.

Our “Ask Billy” comes from Ryan in Maine. “I heard that some guy claims Justin Bieber has a huge cock. What do you think?”

This story got started by a personal trainer named Rick Morrison. While he admits to having never worked with the Bieber, that hasn’t stopped him from expressing an opinion (who does he think he is? Me!). He claims to have seen the pop star coming out of the shower wearing a towel. Later, while walking through the locker room, he spied the Canadian “butt ass naked. I mean, junk hanging out and wearing a towel. Later, while walking through the locker room, he spied the Canadian “butt ass naked. I mean, junk hanging out and wearing a towel. Later, while walking through the locker room, he spied the Canadian “butt ass naked. I mean, junk hanging out and wearing a towel.” Obviously this could be an awkward moment which requires, perhaps, an apology. Rick simply said, “Shit, Bieber, you just made me so insecure”—which tells us more about Rick than about Justin!

When people online questioned the veracity of this report based on the flaccid photos we’ve all seen, Morrison said, “I’ve seen plenty of naked celebs in the locker room before. Shawn Mendes, Adam Levine...but no one was ever that damn blessed.”

May I ask the location of this gym where one sees naked male celebs walking to and fro? Regardless, here’s one rule I live by—unless you’ve seen someone’s penis erect, you have no idea what they’re working with. I have not seen Bieber’s penis erect. Soft, I can say with the utmost certainty that it’s nothing to write home about—if you’re given to writing prose about a penis, you just made me so insecure—which tells us more about Rick than about Justin! When people online questioned the veracity of this report based on the flaccid photos we’ve all seen, Morrison said, “I’ve seen plenty of naked celebs in the locker room before. Shawn Mendes, Adam Levine...but no one was ever that damn blessed.”

I am never against people living their best lives. I don’t believe someone’s penis erect, you have no idea what they’re working with. I have not seen Bieber’s penis erect. Soft, I can say with the utmost certainty that it’s nothing to write home about—if you’re given to writing prose about a penis, you just made me so insecure—which tells us more about Rick than about Justin! When people online questioned the veracity of this report based on the flaccid photos we’ve all seen, Morrison said, “I’ve seen plenty of naked celebs in the locker room before. Shawn Mendes, Adam Levine...but no one was ever that damn blessed.”
of us and Boston Pride is particularly concerned with the status of our LGBTQ seniors, youth, and other vulnerable members of the community. As an organization dedicated to social justice, we are particularly concerned in protecting the vulnerable members of our community most at risk. This was not an easy decision to make as we understand the ripple effect, including a financial one, which postponing the events will have on our community, our partners and our vendors. We made the decision with the City to postpone out of an abundance of caution to protect the community and the Greater Boston region. We will work towards a safe and healthy Pride in 2021, when we know hundreds of thousands of our supporters, friends, and allies will be able to celebrate the decades of progress we’ve made safely. We truly are a community that cares for each other and we are #WickedProud,” said DeMarco.

“We stand with our Boston Pride partners this year, next year, and always,” said Chris Wayland President & General Manager, Boston Owned Properties & Regional Sports Networks. “NBC10 Boston, Telemundo Boston and NECN will commemorate the anniversary of their 50 years and look forward to once again safely marching side by side.” NBC10 Boston, NECN, and Telemundo Boston, is the exclusive broadcast media partner of Boston Pride.

For registered Parade participants and Festival booth registrants, registrations are valid for the new date. Regarding refunds, please visit the Boston Pride website for information.
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