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## Obama Lifts a Ban on Entry Into U.S. by H.I.V.-Positive People

By [JULIA PRESTON](#)

[President Obama](#) on Friday announced the end of a 22-year ban on travel to the United States by people who had tested positive for the virus that causes [AIDS](#), fulfilling a promise he made to gay advocates and acting to eliminate a restriction he said was “rooted in fear rather than fact.”

At a White House ceremony, Mr. Obama announced that a rule canceling the ban would be published on Monday and would take effect after a routine 60-day waiting period. The president had promised to end the ban before the end of the year.

“If we want to be a global leader in combating H.I.V./AIDS, we need to act like it,” Mr. Obama said. “Now, we talk about reducing the stigma of this disease, yet we’ve treated a visitor living with it as a threat.”

The United States is one of only about a dozen countries that bar people who have H.I.V., the virus that causes AIDS.

President [George W. Bush](#) started the process last year when he signed legislation, passed by Congress in July 2008, that repealed the statute on which the ban was based. But the ban remained in effect.

It was enacted in 1987 at a time of widespread fear that H.I.V. could be transmitted by physical or respiratory contact. The ban was further strengthened by Congress in 1993 as an amendment offered by Senator [Jesse Helms](#), Republican of North Carolina.

Because of the restriction, no major international conference on the AIDS epidemic has been held in the United States since 1990. Public health officials here have long said there was no scientific or medical basis for the ban.

Under the ban, United States health authorities have been required to list H.I.V. infection as a “communicable disease of public health significance.” Under [immigration](#) law, most foreigners with such a disease cannot travel to the United States. The ban covered both visiting tourists and foreigners seeking to live in this country.

Once the ban is lifted, foreigners applying to become residents in the United States will no longer be required to take a test for AIDS.

In practice, the ban particularly affected tourists and gay men. Waivers were available, but the procedure for tourists and other short-term visitors who were H.I.V. positive was so complicated that many concluded it was not worth it.

For foreigners hoping to immigrate, waivers were available for people who were in a heterosexual marriage, but not for gay couples. Gay advocates said the ban had led to painful separations in families with H.I.V.-positive members that came to live in this country, and had discouraged adoptions of children with the virus.

Gay advocates said the ban also discouraged travelers and some foreigners already living in the United States from seeking testing and medical care for H.I.V. infection.

“The connection between immigration and H.I.V. has frightened people away from testing and treatment,” said Rachel B. Tiven, executive director of [Immigration Equality](#), a group that advocates for gay people in immigration matters. She said lifting the ban would bring “a significant public health improvement.”

“Stigma and exclusion are not a sound basis for immigration policy,” Ms. Tiven said.

Senator [John Kerry](#), Democrat of Massachusetts, who led the effort to repeal the ban, said it had now “gone the way of the dinosaur.”

But, Mr. Kerry added, “it sure took too long to get here.”

International health officials said lifting the ban would end a much-criticized inconsistency in United States health policy, with Washington playing a leading role in AIDS prevention in Africa and other countries with severe epidemics, but preserving restrictions that in practice prevented international AIDS researchers and activists from gathering at conferences here.

In 1989, a Dutch AIDS educator, Hans Verhoef, was detained for several days in St. Paul when he tried to attend a conference. Since then, people involved with AIDS issues have not organized meetings here.

“We think this is going to give a very positive image of where the United States is going in terms of eliminating stigma and discrimination in relation to H.I.V.,” Dr. Socorro Gross, assistant director of the Pan American Health Organization, said Friday.