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3. Hepatitis C: Disclosure

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Who do I tell about my Hepatitis C?

Some people with hepatitis C have reported prejudice, stigma and discrimination due to their hepatitis C status. This is largely due to lack of awareness and knowledge and an unreasonable fear of hepatitis C.

An individual with hepatitis C does not have to tell anyone their status.

In some circumstances people are required to disclose their status. However, they can choose to avoid these situations if they wish. These situations include

- donating blood or body organs
- performing exposure prone medical procedures as a health care worker
- joining the armed forces
- applying for health or life insurance, if the question is asked

If disclosure is requested outside these situations, seek legal advice or contact the Equal Opportunity Commission. (See **Discrimination section**)

If you have hepatitis C, you may need to consider whom you want to tell about your hepatitis C, when you will tell them and how you will tell them.

You are not obliged to tell anyone unless you want to.

Sometimes this decision requires time and it may be useful to talk to a counsellor or an anonymous telephone information and support service such as Hep C Infoline 1800 703 003.. The decision of whom to tell is an individual one and there is no right or wrong. If you do decide to tell someone, it may be useful to have some written information with you. Some people find that they need time to adjust to knowing they have hepatitis C themselves before making any decisions regarding disclosing to others.

You may be worried that you have passed the virus on to someone else. You may want to discuss this with your doctor or counsellor before you make any decisions about telling the person. (See **Support section**)

In a Health Care Setting

You are not legally required to tell health professionals (doctors, nurses, dentists etc.) that you have hepatitis C, as they should be using standard infection control procedures. This means that ALL blood is treated as infectious and appropriate precautions should be taken all the time.



You may however choose to tell health care professionals about your hepatitis C status, as this information may assist them in providing better health care. For example, some medications may not agree with your liver.

Your health care is important. If you don't feel comfortable talking openly with your health care practitioner, you may need to consider trying another one.

Workplace, School or University Setting

Again you are not legally obliged to declare your hepatitis C status. This is because all blood at work or school should be treated as infectious and standard infection control procedures should be used.

Partners or Potential Partners

You may be wondering if and when to tell a partner or potential partner of your hepatitis C status. This decision may require some thought and in the end you need to feel comfortable with the decision you make.

There are a number of questions that you may be asking yourself. Should I tell my partner/potential partner? Do I need to tell someone who is a "one night stand"? Should I tell someone straight away or should I wait a while? What might his/her reaction be? If I am rejected, how will I handle it?

Decisions of if, when and how to disclose your hepatitis C status to a partner or potential partner are individual ones and may vary for each situation. These decisions may take some time and sometimes you may need to follow your gut feeling.

It is OK not to rush into telling someone that you have hepatitis C. You may want time to think things through and talk to someone. If you would like some support in making any decisions, it may be useful to speak to a counsellor or a telephone counselling service such as HepC infoline.

When you have decided to disclose to your partner/potential partner, it may be difficult for you to judge how he/she will react. Many people have positive experiences. Your partner/potential partner may need some time to adjust to your news. At this stage some couples find it useful to talk together with a counsellor. Your partner may also wish to have a separate time with a counsellor or speak to a telephone counselling service such as HepC Infoline. (See **Support list**)

Whether or not you decide to disclose your hepatitis C status, it is important to practice safe sex with a new partner or if you are unsure of your partner's sexual health. This is to protect you against sexually transmissible infections.

Telling Family and Friends

Many people with hepatitis C are unsure whether to tell family and friends about their hepatitis C diagnosis. Again there is no right or wrong decision.



There is no hurry to tell people that you have hepatitis C. You might need some time to digest the information for yourself. You might also need the time to think carefully about whom you want to tell, when you want to tell them and what you might say.

Some people are open about their hepatitis C and others are very private. It is quite common for people not to tell everyone they know. They might only tell people who they feel they can trust and who they believe will be supportive.

The following are some issues that you might confront when you disclose to family and friends:

- Some people may be more supportive than you think
- Others may not be as supportive as you had hoped for
- Some people may be worried about you and your health
- Some people may be concerned about transmission

It is useful to have some written information with you when disclosing your hepatitis C. This can often help in answering some of the questions that people might ask. It may also be helpful for them to read after you have told them.

If you are feeling confused or worried about telling family and friends that you have hepatitis C, it may be a good idea to talk to a counsellor. (See Support and Information Fact Sheet)

It is also possible for your family or friends to talk to a counsellor with or without you.

Telling children

The decision to tell your child or children that you have been diagnosed with hepatitis C may not be an easy one. This is an individual decision and what is right for one person may not be right for another one.

Again there is no hurry to tell your children that you have hepatitis C. You might need some time to digest the information yourself. You might also need time to think about the issues involved in telling your children. Some of these issues may include:

- Pros and cons of telling your children
- Age of the children: how much information are they capable of taking in? Will they be able to keep your privacy if that is important to you?
- What information about your diagnosis and yourself would be relevant for your children to know?
- How might your children react to the news of your diagnosis and how might you deal with it?
- If you do not tell your children at some stage, what will be the impact of this for you and your children?

If you are unsure whether to tell your children that you have hepatitis C or how to go about telling them, it may be useful to talk to a counsellor.



A free and confidential service for people seeking information about HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis and sexually transmissible infections (STIs)

Testing children

If you had hepatitis C before your children were born, they may have been exposed to the hepatitis C virus. The risk that your children may have hepatitis C is low and is only possible if the virus was active (i.e. your PCR result is positive) when you were pregnant and/or giving birth.

This brings up issues about whether to test your children to see if they have contracted hepatitis C. You may need time to think carefully about this and wish to talk to a counsellor while you make this decision.

If you decide to test your children to see if they have hepatitis C, wait until they are at least 18 months old. Children gain their mother's antibodies to viruses at birth and PCR tests may be negative early on. It is not until they are at least 18 months of age that you can tell if the children are still affected by hepatitis C virus.

The issue about whether to treat children who have hepatitis C is not clear. If you find that your child has hepatitis C, discuss this with your local doctor. You may wish to get a referral to the liver clinic at a children's hospital.

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Produced by

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