

Disclosure & confidentiality



FACTSHEET 07

Hepatitis Council of Qld

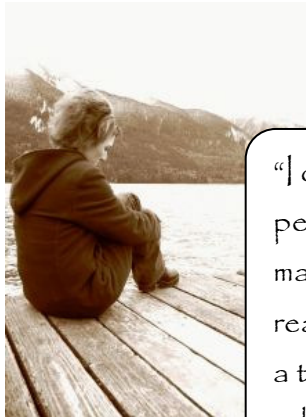
“ It is important to remember that you have control over who you choose to tell. **You may choose not to tell some people you have hepatitis, and this is your right.** Your choice not to tell is your own and should be respected

Some people with viral hepatitis may feel that they have an obligation to disclose their hepatitis status, however the impact of disclosure on their personal relationships and in public life, particularly when entering the healthcare sector, may have negative consequences. In most circumstances, a person's decision to disclose their hepatitis status is a very personal decision of whom to tell, why, when, where, how, and so on.

Who do I have to tell?

Generally speaking you don't have to tell anybody that you have hepatitis; however there are four **exceptions** to this:

- Healthcare workers engaging in 'invasive or exposure prone procedures' (e.g. surgery or other procedures that may require a nurse, surgeon or other healthcare provider to work in the body of another person. People performing such exposure prone procedures are required to know their status and are guided by the State Health Department policy. For more information refer to the Queensland Health Infection Control Guidelines;



"I only told people who mattered; it really can be a test of relationships"

- If donating blood at the Blood Bank (you also cannot donate blood products, semen, ova or organs if you have hepatitis B or C);
- In the case of employment in the armed services; and
- Insurance and superannuation.

In these situations you are **required by law** to disclose your hepatitis status.

Disclosure in healthcare settings

Some people have experienced discrimination from healthcare workers after telling them they have hepatitis. Think about which healthcare workers you choose to tell. Remember that 'standard precautions' prevent transmission by treating **all** blood as potentially infectious, whether a person is aware of their hepatitis status or not.

Dentists *may* need to know so they can provide good quality care, as studies show people with hepatitis may have poorer oral health or particular oral health needs. The dentist **does not** need to know that you have hepatitis for their 'infection control'; as they must have the same infection control

procedures in place for everybody, regardless of whether they are known to have hepatitis or not.

Disclosure in the workplace

People living with hepatitis are under no legal obligation to tell their employer of their positive status. Australian Anti-Discrimination laws classify hepatitis C as a *disability or impairment*: it is against the law to discriminate against a

The ABC of Hepatitis Training Package is an initiative of Queensland Health through funding provided by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing under the National Hepatitis C Prevention and Education Initiative

Updated: 3 April 2009

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person because they have, or are thought to have, a disability or impairment. This means that discrimination against people with hepatitis in the workplace is effectively illegal.

All workplaces should provide readily available first aid and infection control precautions; therefore it is unnecessary for a worker to disclose their status in the workplace unless disclosure is relevant to the *inherent requirements of the job* (i.e. you are a surgeon performing exposure prone procedures).

Telling someone you have hepatitis

The time may come when you are considering telling someone you have hepatitis B or C. They may be a friend, family, your employer, a healthcare worker, a partner or potential partner.

At the moment you're probably worried about what to say, how to tell them, and what their reaction will be. These feelings are perfectly normal and are experienced by many people when they are preparing to tell someone important or significant in their lives they have hepatitis.

How you decide to tell another person, what you say, and when you tell them, will depend completely on your own personality and style. There are, however, some things you can do to make it easier for both you and the person you are telling.

- Remember that it isn't a confession, you are simply sharing information about yourself;
- Try practicing what you want to say first;
- Make sure you say what feels comfortable to you; and

- Have some brochures or factsheets on hand, so you can answer any questions the other person may ask you.

Interested in finding out more?

Factsheets

- 08 Discrimination & Hepatitis
- 11 First aid and standard precautions
- 15 The workplace and hepatitis
- 16 Hepatitis A, B & C a comparison
- 29 Sexual transmission and hepatitis C
- 32 Superannuation & insurance
- 33 Support

Booklets

- My Rights: anti-discrimination and health complaints laws for people with hepatitis C (*Hepatitis Australia and ANCAHRD*)
- My Choice to Tell: Disclosure information for people with hepatitis C (*Hepatitis Australia and ANCAHRD*)

Organisations

- Queensland Health Infection Control Guidelines, available at: www.health.qld.gov.au/infectioncontrol/
- Anti-Discrimination Commission of Queensland (ADCQ) – phone 1300 130 670, or visit www.adcq.qld.gov.au

Image is from Stock Exchange (www.sxc.hu)

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