

DISCLOSURE WITHIN WORK AND HEALTHCARE

Do I need to tell people at work that I have hepatitis?

People living with hepatitis are under no legal obligation to tell their employer they have hepatitis (unless they are entering the Defence Force, or performing exposure prone procedures, such as surgery). This is your private health information and who you tell is up to you. Anti-discrimination laws classify hepatitis as a disability or impairment, and it is against the law to discriminate against a person with hepatitis in the workplace.

All workplaces are covered by workplace health and safety legislation. So, if there is a blood spill in the workplace, all blood should be treated as infectious. Remember, not everyone knows if they have a blood borne virus. If you are concerned about your workplace's first aid standards in the event of an accident, you could nominate yourself as the first aid officer, so you can be sure all the standard precautions are followed for everyone. (For more information see factsheet 'First aid and standard precautions'.)

Pre-employment medicals

If you are asked about your hepatitis (when it is not relevant to the inherent requirements of the job) you may have to decide how you will respond. A pre-employment medical should only be assessed by a doctor in relation to your fitness to work, and information about your status is not relevant to be passed on to your employer. If you were the preferred candidate, but due to hepatitis did not get the job, this is a breach of anti-discrimination law.

What if I need to manage treatment while working?

Many people who are quite private about their health often find that treatment is a time when they may need to talk about hepatitis with their employer

for the first time. Some people disclose to everyone at work. Others may choose a trusted friend to talk to about being on treatment. If you talk to your manager, your health information should still remain private and confidential, and your workplace has a legal obligation to make 'all reasonable adjustments' to support you through treatment and allow you to change tasks or have time off for appointments.

Some people choose to disclose that they are on treatment (but not that they have hepatitis) and simply talk about a private health issue, saying that they are undergoing a type of treatment for a liver health condition and will need some flexible hours to attend appointments. Other people choose to work through their treatment without disclosing. It is your choice who you tell, and any information you disclose about your health should remain confidential and private.

Do I need to disclose in healthcare settings?

If you are concerned about discrimination when disclosing in a healthcare setting, remember that 'standard precautions' prevent transmission by treating all blood as potentially infectious, whether a person is aware of their hepatitis status or not. You may choose to tell a health professional, to assist you in receiving better quality care (for example, some medications may be hard for your liver to tolerate).

However, it is your decision, and you are not required to disclose. Dentists may need to know so they can provide good quality care, as studies show people with hepatitis may have poorer oral health and particular oral health needs. The dentist does not need to know that you have hepatitis for their 'infection control', because they must have the same infection control procedures in place for everybody,

regardless of whether they are known to have hepatitis or not.

Who do I have to tell?

Generally, you don't have to tell anybody that you have hepatitis, but there are four exceptions:

- Healthcare workers engaging in 'invasive or exposure prone procedures'. This means surgery or other procedures that may require a nurse, surgeon or other healthcare provider to work inside the body of another person. (For more information, refer to the Queensland Health Infection Control Guidelines.)
- If donating blood or blood products (such as plasma), semen, ova, or organs.
- If seeking employment in the Australian Defence Force, you are required to declare your health status in relation to any disease, illness or injury.
- Applying for insurance or superannuation.

In these situations you are required by law to disclose your hepatitis status. However, in almost all other cases, when and how you tell someone you have hepatitis is entirely up to you.

Do I have to disclose hepatitis if I work in healthcare?

If you work in healthcare, disclosure is rarely required unless you are performing exposure prone procedures. Most health workers are not required to disclose hepatitis. In Queensland Health, employees and students must show proof of their hepatitis B vaccination (or proof they are not susceptible to hepatitis B). So if you have hepatitis B, you can choose to disclose, or provide a letter from a doctor stating that you are not susceptible to hepatitis B.

Organisations and Webiste

Queensland health disease and prevention protocols and guidelines

https://www.health.qld.gov.au/chrisp/ic_guidelines/index_guidelines

Anti-discrimination Commission of Queensland

Call: 1300 130 670

<http://www.adcq.qld.gov.au/>

Queensland Health Vaccination of Healthcare workers Guideline, available via:

https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0029/444872/vaccination-of-healthcare-workers.pdf?platform=hootsuite

Information and Support

If you have a question, call Hepatitis QLD InfoLine on 1800 HEP ABC (1800 437 222) or email info@hepqld.asn.au