

TELLING SOMEONE YOU HAVE HEPATITIS

Telling someone you have hepatitis

Some people with viral hepatitis may feel that they have an obligation to disclose their hepatitis status. However, the impact of disclosure may in some cases have negative consequences. In most circumstances, your decision to share information about your hepatitis status is very personal, and you are not required by law to inform others. There may be people that you feel comfortable talking to about your health issues, who may be a good source of support. They may be a friend, family, your employer, a healthcare worker, a partner or a potential partner.

Who do I have to tell?

You generally 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.
- 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.

There are some things you can do to make it easier when telling someone you have hepatitis:

- **Remember that it isn't a confession.** You are simply sharing information about your health.
- Try practicing what you want to say first.
- Use support services such as the Hepatitis Queensland free information line

1800 437 222, or go to www.hepqld.asn.au, so you can get the answers to any questions they may have.

- If you are still dealing with a new diagnosis yourself, perhaps give yourself time to find out more and understand hepatitis before you tell others.
- Give people time to adjust and get to know more about a health issue that they may know very little about. **People's reactions often change over time.**
- In some situations you may choose to partially disclose— to reveal some information but not all of it— or to describe it in an indirect way. Telling someone you have liver health concerns or a blood disorder that can sometimes affect your health can be ways of doing this
- Often if you are comfortable with hepatitis and clearly describing it as a health condition that needs to be managed (like diabetes), people will often take their cues from you about how they should respond. So be calm and clear and present it as a manageable health condition.

Everyone will respond differently, so be patient and make sure you provide people with clear **information, and give them Hepatitis Queensland's** number to call.



Images © istockphoto.com. Models used for illustrative

Should I tell a partner or potential partner that I have hepatitis?

This is a very personal decision, and you need to do what feels comfortable for you. Some people **don't tell casual or potential partners, but will talk** to people about their health once they have a more established relationship. You will need to decide what point of the relationship feels comfortable to start talking about these health issues.

Hepatitis B can be sexually transmitted. So if you have Hepatitis B, many people like to give their partner the option of being fully vaccinated before starting a sexual relationship. Using condoms is **still important, especially if you don't know if your** partner has been vaccinated, and it also prevents against other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Hepatitis C is not considered a virus that is sexually transmitted. However, before having unprotected sex, many people make sure both partners are making an informed decision about their health.

If you are starting a new relationship, remember you are not required to tell anyone. However, you have to decide for yourself when is the right time that you feel comfortable to disclose your hepatitis status to those you care about. Some people may feel that their trust has been broken if decisions are made in a relationship or informed choices about sexual practice were not made together.

Remember, for many people this may be the first time they have heard about hepatitis. Even people close to you may need some time to adjust, read some information and ask questions, before they can best support you.

“ When I told my partner I had hepatitis, he was really worried. I got him to go on the website and we kept talking it through, and he has been a great support. Sometimes it's just hard at first to talk about something that so few people understand.”

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