

Hepatitis C

Telling People You Have Hepatitis C

Why should I tell people that I have hepatitis C?

If you share your diagnosis with people in your life, they might be able to

- offer you support and understanding;
- provide you with assistance, such as running errands and helping with child care, doctor visits, and work;
- understand better how hepatitis C is spread and work with you to prevent the virus from spreading.

Who should I tell?

Sharing your diagnosis with others is an important personal decision. It can make a big difference in how you cope with the disease. It can also affect your relationships with people. If you decide to share your diagnosis, it is best to tell people you trust or people directly affected, such as people you have shared needles with to inject drugs, household members, or sex partner(s). You may want to ask that the information you share be kept private.

People you may want to share your diagnosis with include

- sex partner(s)
- past or present needle-sharing partners
- roommates or family members
- people who you spend a lot of time with, such as good friends
- all your health care providers, such as doctors, nurses, and dentists

What sorts of things should I say?

You may want to begin with when and how you found out that you have hepatitis C. You may want to give information on how the virus is spread and how the virus is *NOT* spread. Explain that hepatitis C is spread through blood-to-blood contact. Inform the person that hepatitis C is not spread through casual contact, such as hugging or shaking hands. In particular, you should discuss:

■ **Any shared risk factors**

If you got hepatitis C through an activity that involved other people, discuss the risk related to that activity. For example, if you shared needles to inject drugs, inform past and present needle-sharing partners that they may need to get tested for hepatitis C.

■ **The risk of getting hepatitis C through sex and sexual contact**

Inform your sex partner(s) that though it is hard to get the virus through sexual contact, the two of you might want to practice safer sex. You may want to encourage your sex partner(s) to get tested for hepatitis C.



■ **Medicines you are taking for hepatitis C**

Talk about the side effects you may have from the medicines. You may want to give them the fact sheets called *Do You Know a Veteran Who Is Being Treated for Hepatitis C?* and *Treatments for Hepatitis C*.

■ **Lifestyle changes**

Discuss lifestyle changes that you have made and will continue to make, such as avoiding alcohol and high-risk activities, including injection drug use and unsafe sex.

When should I tell them?

Many people share their diagnosis as soon as they find out. Others wait for some time to adjust to the news and get more information. You should share your diagnosis as soon as possible with people who may be directly affected by your diagnosis, such as sex partners or needle-sharing partners. Encourage sex partners and past or present needle-sharing partners to get tested for hepatitis C. When you decide to tell someone, choose a quiet moment when you will have time to talk and ask each other questions.

Who can I call for more information on hepatitis C?

When you have shared your diagnosis with others, you may want additional help. Find out about local agencies, support groups (for both patients and family members), and hepatitis C organizations. Be sure to talk with your VA doctor or nurse if you have any other questions.

Call your local VA medical center and visit the Veterans Affairs Hepatitis C Web site at <http://www.hepatitis.va.gov/>

Contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Hepatitis Toll-Free Information Line at 1-888-4 HEP CDC (1-888-443-7232) and visit the Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis>



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