

What is disclosure?

Disclosure means giving personal or sensitive information to other people—in this case, telling people you have hepatitis C. For some people disclosing that they have hepatitis C is not easy. Others may be more comfortable with disclosing.

Telling people that you have hepatitis C can be daunting. You may be worried about how those you tell will react and that you will be treated differently or discriminated against once people know you have hepatitis C. There can also be benefits to telling people you have hepatitis C. Disclosing can allow others a greater understanding of your health and enable friends and family to be a source of support.

In most situations, whether or not to disclose that you have hepatitis C is entirely up to you. In making the decision whether or not to disclose, it may help to consider how the person or people you disclose to may react, how this may affect you and how you might deal with any negative reactions.

Points to consider if you have decided to disclose

- it can help to find out as much as you can about hepatitis C before you tell others. Providing people with accurate information about hepatitis C can help correct any misconception they may have about hepatitis C and people with hepatitis C;
- some people find it useful to practice disclosing in their mind or to a friend, confidant, counsellor or hepatitis worker, before disclosing to others in their life;
- there are better times than others to share with someone new information about yourself. It is important that you have the discussion when both of you can give the subject time and attention;
- if possible, have a supportive person/people you can easily contact when you are disclosing to someone important to you. Sometimes you can need support whether the person you disclose to has a negative or positive reaction;
- it can be a shock for friends or family to find out that you have hepatitis C and it's important to give the person time to come terms with this new information. It may help to give them a contact for further information, such as a hepatitis C helpline; and
- remember that different people will react differently when you tell them you have hepatitis C. If the outcome is a negative one it is important to remember that this is not a reflection on you and you are not responsible for their reaction.

When do I have to disclose?

There a small number of instances when you may be required by law to tell others that you have hepatitis C. You are required to disclose your hepatitis C status in the following circumstances:

- if you are giving blood to the blood bank and you know you have hepatitis C, you are required to disclose this to them and your blood will not be accepted for donation. When blood is donated it is also screened for a range of infections, including hepatitis C. You may also be required to disclose if donating bodily organs or other bodily fluids, such as sperm;
- if you are a health care worker who conducts exposure prone procedures and you have hepatitis you may be required to notify your employer. Disclosure requirements differ from state to state. The Hepatitis Council, local health department or your union will be able to provide you with more information about local requirements;

- some insurance policies, particularly life insurance, require that you disclose any infections, disabilities or illnesses you have that might influence the insurance company's decision to ensure you. If you don't disclose this information it may affect future claims you may make. Be sure to read all insurance policies carefully and seek advice if you feel you need to; and
- if you are a member of the Australian Defence Force and you have hepatitis C, you will have to disclose this. You may be required to leave the forces if you have hepatitis C, although this is determined on a case-by-case basis. You are also required to disclose any existing medical conditions on application to enter the Australian Defence Force.

Do I need to disclose to sexual partners?

Hepatitis C is transmitted via blood-to-blood contact and is not classified as a sexually transmissible infection. In rare cases where hepatitis C may be passed on during sexual contact, it is most likely to be through blood-to-blood contact. Where there is a risk of blood-to-blood contact during foreplay or sex, or where there is a risk of the transmission of sexually transmissible infections, it is recommended you practice safe sex.

Because of the low risk of infection during sex, if you are practicing safe sex, whether or not to disclose to a sexual partner is your choice.

Do I need to disclose to healthcare workers?

You do not have to tell any healthcare worker that you have hepatitis C unless you intend to donate blood, other body fluids or body organs. All healthcare workers are required to follow standard infection control procedures.

You may wish to consider whether disclosing that you have hepatitis C will affect the quality of care you receive. There are reported cases of healthcare workers discriminating against people with hepatitis C and you may determine not to disclose if your quality of care isn't going to be affected by your hepatitis status.

Some medications may be damaging to a liver that is affected by hepatitis C and if you are given any medications it is in your best interests you ask about the likely affect on your liver.

Should I disclose at work?

Unless you work in, or are thinking of working in, the Australian Defence Force or are a healthcare worker who performs exposure prone procedures you do not have to tell your employer or anyone you work with that you have hepatitis C unless you want to.

When applying for a job you may be asked to fill out a pre-employment form that asks questions about your health. You do not have to answer any questions about hepatitis C unless it is necessary to determine if you can do the essential requirements of the particular job. There may be situations that arise where you may be required to disclose, including taking time off if you are ill due to hepatitis.

Occupational Health and Safety laws state that employers must provide easy access to first aid materials and must treat all blood spills in the workplace as if there is an infection present. If you are unsure or concerned about the quality of first aid and infection control procedures at your work you may wish to raise this with your employer.

There are many cases in which people with hepatitis C have been discriminated against in the workplace. However there may be benefits for you to disclose, such as the ability to arrange your working conditions to suit your health or treatment regime more effectively.

Any information that you give to your employer or other people you work with about your health is private and confidential and is not permitted to be passed on without your permission.

For more information

For further information on hepatitis C please contact the national infoline 1300 HEP ABC (1300 437 222). The infoline diverts to information and support lines at your local state or territory hepatitis council.

Some of the information on hepatitis C above has been abridged from various resources, these resources include:

My Choice to Tell (Hepatitis Australia)—can be ordered from your local Hepatitis Council (ph. 1300 437 222) or download PDF from www.hepatitisaustralia.com