



# HEPATITIS C LESSONS • PART 4

## *Telling Others You Have Hepatitis C*

### **PURPOSE**

To help group members understand who they should tell and who they may want to tell about their condition. Also includes strategies for telling people.

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### **FACTS ABOUT TELLING PEOPLE YOU HAVE HEPATITIS C**

It's not easy telling anyone that you have hepatitis C. But it's vital that you tell anyone who you think you may have exposed to the virus. It's a good idea to have the support group practice with each other.

There are 2 reasons why you must tell anyone you may have exposed to the virus:

- *They can get tested*
- *They can avoid passing the virus to others, if they are also infected*

Other than these people, you do not have to tell anyone that you have hepatitis C, unless you want to. But remember that it is important to tell your medical providers so they can monitor your health.

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### **DISCUSSION TOPICS**

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Should you tell other people about your virus?

What should you tell others?

What is denial?

What do you tell your employer and coworkers?

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**Handout:** Telling a child you have hepatitis C  
Telling a partner or spouse you have hepatitis C

## *You may want to encourage people in your group to role-play with these sample questions and answers*

### **Should you tell other people about your infection?**

You should tell anyone you may have exposed to hepatitis C, such as:

- *Anyone you've recently shared a needle or cocaine/crank straw or crack pipe with*
- *Your medical healthcare providers and your dentist*

It is important that people with hepatitis C tell anyone they may have exposed to the virus as soon as possible. That way, the people they have come in contact with can get tested and avoid passing on the virus to others.

If someone with hepatitis C can't tell someone who they may have exposed to the virus, most city or county health departments will inform the person of the potential exposure. The health department does not need to reveal names.

Other than those who may have been exposed, people with hepatitis C don't have to say they have the virus, unless they want to. This is a very important and personal decision that needs a great deal of thought.

When people with the virus reveal they are infected, they need to be prepared. A lot of people have little or no information about hepatitis C. Or even worse, they may have wrong information.

- *Many people tell others that they have hepatitis C as soon as they find out. But others wait to reveal it because they need a little time to deal with the shock, or they need time to learn more about the virus*
- *Telling people close to you can be upsetting for you and them*







## HANDOUT

### Hepatitis C Basics, Part 4 Telling Others You Have Hepatitis C (Lesson 4)

## How do you tell your loved ones you have hepatitis C?

*Telling the people close to you that you have hepatitis C can be difficult. Here are 2 suggestions for how to let certain people in your life know:*

### Telling a young child you have hepatitis C

You may want to give just enough information so that your children know you are sick. It is important to tell a child that this doesn't mean you're going to die. When you believe they are ready for more information, start with, "Remember when I told you I was sick? Well, I would like to talk about it a little more to make sure you understand. My liver is sick with something called hepatitis C. Don't worry. You cannot catch it from me. It's not like a cold or sore throat. It is only in my liver and blood. To make sure you don't get sick,

it's important that you don't use any of my things that could have my blood on them, my toothbrush for instance."

If you are going to have treatment, you may want to add, "I will need to take some medicine the doctor gave me. There may be times when it makes me feel sick. I will try very hard to be healthy. Sometimes, I may be sick to my stomach and throw up. Other times, I may just be tired and have to rest. I will be trying very hard to get better."

## Telling a partner or spouse you have hepatitis C

This may not be an easy conversation. You may need to share things you never wanted to, such as choices you made in your past. Being open and honest is important because it allows your partner or spouse to be supportive.

You can begin with, “I need to talk to you about my visit to the doctor. I have hepatitis C. It means my liver may be damaged and I could have some symptoms, like pain or tiredness. Or I could be fine for a long time.”

Even if you’re not 100% sure, you owe it to your partner or spouse to try to explain how you got the virus: “I am not sure how I got it. The virus is transmitted by coming into contact with infected blood. This means at one point in my life, I may have gotten the virus by sharing a needle for drugs.” Another person may say, “It’s possible that it was transmitted through infected blood from dirty piercings or tattooing.” A third person might explain, “It could have happened through a blood transfusion

or getting an organ, because they didn’t screen for hepatitis C before 1992.” Each person’s situation will be different.

Show that you want your partner to be safe, too: “You will have to get tested. There could be a chance that you have it, too. The important thing is that we never share things that might have traces of blood on them, like razors and toothbrushes. I have to be careful about anyone coming into contact with my blood. Right now, there is no vaccine for hepatitis C.”

If you are considering having treatment, you may want to add, “I have been talking to my doctor about treatment for hepatitis C. It is very difficult to go through treatment, and it may last as long as 12-24 weeks. If I do the treatment, I may need shots and need to take pills as my healthcare provider prescribes. They have some side effects. Treatment could help me, but I will definitely need your help to get through it.”

