



HCV and Work-Related Issues

A Guide for Employers and Coworkers

FORWARD

Millions of Americans live with chronic hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection. There may be someone in your workplace who has HCV. You cannot tell by looking at someone if he or she has this virus. You may have some questions or concerns about working with someone who has HCV. You may feel afraid of HCV or wonder if you can get it. It is human nature to fear illness, especially an illness you know nothing about. However, there is no reason to fear HCV. The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide accurate information and reassurance to those working with someone who has HCV.

What is HCV?

HCV is a virus that affects the liver and other organs of the body. Over time, HCV can damage the liver and health of an individual. It can be life-threatening if not identified, treated and cured in time.

HCV symptoms can be vague because they are similar to many other medical conditions. Some people may have little or no symptoms. The most commonly reported one is fatigue. Body aches, flu-like symptoms, depression, and abdominal discomfort are also symptoms of HCV. Some patients report difficulty concentrating or that their thinking feels cloudy.

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HCSP FACT SHEET

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The information in this fact sheet is designed to help you understand and manage HCV and is not intended as medical advice. All persons with HCV should consult a medical practitioner for diagnosis and treatment of HCV.

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HCV Transmission

HCV transmission in the workplace is largely unheard of. HCV is passed via blood-to-blood contact. HCV is not transmitted by hugging, kissing, sneezing, coughing, sharing eating utensils or glasses, sharing toilet facilities or by casual contact. There is no vaccine against HCV.

People with occupations that require direct contact with blood should follow government and workplace safety guidelines. The rate of infection for those in healthcare occupations is close to that of the general population. Safety precautions protect patients who might come into contact with an HCV-positive healthcare worker.

The HCV Patient During Treatment

HCV treatment medications may cause some side effects. Some common ones are headache, fatigue, diarrhea and nausea.

These side effects are temporary and they will reverse with time after HCV treatment is stopped. HCV treatment is usually 8 to 12 weeks, although some people need longer courses of treatment. The treatment cure rates now approach 100%.

How You Can Help

The extent that HCV interferes with the health and daily living of individuals varies. Your coworker

or employee may be facing challenges relating to HCV. The best thing you can do is try to support your coworker. Most patients appreciate support, particularly in the workplace.

The next step is to treat your HCV-positive coworker with the same dignity and respect you had before you knew about his or her HCV status. There is no need to act any differently just because of this. Show kindness and tolerance. If appropriate, ask your coworker if you can help in any way. This is especially important if the coworker is on treatment or has advanced disease.

Fatigue is the most common symptom of HCV and HCV treatment. The degree of fatigue can range from mild to severe. An employee suffering from moderate to severe fatigue or other symptoms may need workplace accommodations. Perhaps your employee needs daily rest periods, shorter hours, an earlier or later start time, or a lighter workload. Your coworker is going through a great deal and would probably appreciate help on the job. Patients often “look good”. This can create problems, especially if the patient feels awful and assumes everyone around him can see this. Do not assume that because someone “looks good” that they feel good. Keep confidential information to yourself. Do not disclose your coworker’s

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HCV status to other employees. It is especially important to maintain confidentiality if you learned about a coworker’s HCV status through a third person. You may have heard false information. Unless someone self-discloses, it is none of your business. You are showing support by picking up this factsheet and getting information. We hope that this information is useful. If you have more questions, you can find accurate information at the Hepatitis C Support Project’s website: www.hcvadvocate.org.

**GET TESTED
GET TREATED
GET CURED**

Related publications:

Stigma and Hepatitis C

www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/Stigma_Guide.pdf

A Guide to Hepatitis C Disclosure

www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/Disclosure_Guide.pdf

Dispelling Myths about HCV

www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/Myths.pdf

For more information

- **Americans with Disabilities Act**
www.ada.gov
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**
www.cdc.gov
- **Mayo Clinic**
www.mayoclinic.com
- **MedlinePlus**
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus

HCV Education and Support

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