

# TELLING OTHERS

Information and advice  
for people on sharing  
their HIV status



Being diagnosed with HIV can be life changing. The wide range of feelings and emotions that you may well be experiencing are completely normal and wondering about what comes next is an important part of coming to terms with your diagnosis. There are potentially many things to consider following your HIV diagnosis and one of these could be who to tell - often called disclosure.

**Disclosure:-**

*Means telling someone that you are HIV positive, that you are living with HIV. It can be a very difficult process deciding who, when and how to tell, but it can also be a very liberating experience with many positive effects.*



# WHO TO TELL?

Although you don't have to tell everyone that you are HIV positive, it is advisable to inform anyone who may have been at risk of transmission or could be in the future:

- Current, past and future sexual partners
- Current, past and future drug injecting partners
- Your GP and other health care providers
- If you are a health care worker, you are obliged to inform your organisation's Occupational Health Department



# HIV AND THE LAW

You may have heard or read about people being prosecuted for transmitting HIV to another person. Whilst it is important to be aware of this, you should also be aware that prosecution has only happened to a small number of people.

If a person is accused of 'recklessly' transmitting HIV they can only be found guilty and convicted if **ALL** of the following five conditions apply:

- **HIV transmission occurred**
- **They (the person who was living with HIV) knew their status at the time**
- **They understood the risks of how HIV is transmitted from one person to another**
- **They did not take the necessary precautions to prevent transmission e.g. using condoms**
- **Their partner was not aware of their HIV status, (or if they were aware, they agreed to sex with or without a condom)**

There is currently no law in England, Wales or Northern Ireland that requires a person who is living with HIV to disclose their status with any current or future sexual partners. There are, however, benefits to doing so which are further detailed on the next page.



# SEXUAL PARTNERS

Although informing sexual partners of your HIV status can be difficult there can be some real benefits including:

- It can help you to talk openly and honestly about sex and safer sex
- It can help you feel more relaxed and at ease about sex
- Not having the stress and anxieties about trying to keep a secret
- It allows your sexual partner to make their own choices about 'risk' and - if needed - to access HIV testing or treatment that may prevent them becoming HIV positive (PEP)



# HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS

Being aware of your health status means that health care professionals can:

- Offer the most appropriate advice and treatment - taking all factors into account including how your immune system is functioning and any HIV medication you might be taking. Some drugs for instance, have an adverse affect if taken with HIV medication.
- Offer you information, advice and referral through to other agencies that may be of benefit to you including social work support and counselling services



# HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS

All healthcare providers, including non-medical staff, are bound by professional confidentiality. This means that no-one should see your medical records or discuss anything about you unless they are involved in your treatment and care.

While it might be useful for different health care providers who are treating you to share information (such as a GP and hospital doctor) your consent will be sought before information about your HIV is shared.

A doctor may disclose your status to another health care professional without your consent if you or another person were at risk of significant harm.



# TIPS & ADVICE

Although people can't plan for others' reactions, having a plan about who, where and when to tell, along with a good support system in place can be really helpful.

- **Think about and ask yourself why you want people to know.** Do you want or need a specific kind of support from the person you have decided to tell?
- **What agreement would you like to make about them telling other people?**  
How will you feel if they tell others?

- **Plan what you are going to say** - rehearse with a friend, a health care worker or someone else who is HIV positive
- **Have some useful information** - you might want to have some information, leaflets, magazines, website links to show to the person you are telling, or to leave for them to read
- **Make sure you do it in a safe place** so that everyone is comfortable and in an environment where you can have an honest and confidential discussion
- **Let a friend or support worker know** so that they can check that you are OK and to give you any post disclosure support you might need

- **Think about how your disclosure might affect the person you are telling** - think about what support they might need and how they can access it
- **Talk with other people** who are in a similar position to yourself about different ways to disclose your HIV status to others. This may be through visiting your local HIV peer support group or other reputable forums, including on-line forums
- If you do not wish to disclose to sexual or injecting partners yourself, the Health Adviser can inform them of their risk confidentially, without your name being mentioned

**Remember, there is no right or wrong way to do it. The method you want to use is entirely personal to you and should be what's best for you.**



Whatever the reaction you get when you tell someone your HIV status, there is support to prepare you and to talk it through afterwards - whether you get a positive and supportive outcome or not.

Deciding who and when to tell anyone that you have HIV may be a really daunting prospect and the fear of negative reactions can be a real and understandable barrier. Counsellors, Health Advisers, Specialist Nurses and other HIV Support Workers can be helpful in talking through your feelings about disclosure and offer support in formulating a plan for how to do it and how to manage any issues that might arise afterwards.

Talking to other people who are living with HIV may also be useful. Sharing experiences, anxieties, concerns and solutions with other people in a similar situation can be really helpful in identifying how you would want to disclose your HIV status to others. If you are unable to, or would not wish to access a local peer support group, there are a range of forums, blogs and websites that may be of use (see back page for website addresses)

Sexual Health Sheffield offers support, advice and information for people living with and affected by HIV, including issues of disclosure.

**HIV Nursing Team tel: 0114 271 3531**

**Health Advisers tel: 0114 226 8888**

**Specialist Nursing Team, E Floor, Royal Hallamshire Hospital tel: 0114 271 1882**

## Useful Websites

[www.positivelysheffield.co.uk](http://www.positivelysheffield.co.uk)

Information for people living with and affected by HIV in Sheffield

[www.tht.org/myhiv](http://www.tht.org/myhiv)

Online community forum for people living with HIV in the UK

[www.shetoshe.org](http://www.shetoshe.org)

Information and resources for women living with HIV

[www.aidsmap.com](http://www.aidsmap.com)

National and international HIV and AIDS information and resources

[www.nat.org.uk](http://www.nat.org.uk)

National resource championing the rights of people living with HIV

PIL: 3580

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[www.sexualhealthsheffield.nhs.uk](http://www.sexualhealthsheffield.nhs.uk)