



# TELLING OTHERS YOU'RE HIV-POSITIVE

## WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?

When you test positive for HIV, it can be difficult to know who to tell about it, and how to tell them.

### Telling others can be good because:

- You can get love and support to help you deal with your health.
- You can keep your close friends and loved ones informed about issues that are important to you.
- You don't have to hide your HIV status.
- You can get the most appropriate health care.
- You can reduce the chances of transmitting the disease to others.
- In many states, you can be found guilty of a felony for not telling a sexual partner you are HIV-positive before having intimate contact.

### Telling others may be bad because:

- Others may find it hard to accept your health status.
- Some people might discriminate against you because of your HIV.
- You may be rejected in social or dating situations.

### You don't have to tell everybody.

Take your time to decide who to tell and how you will approach them. Be sure you're ready. **Once you tell someone, they won't forget you are HIV-positive.**

## GENERAL GUIDELINES

Here are some things to think about when you're considering telling someone that you're HIV-positive:

- **Know why** you want to tell them. What do you want from them?
- **Anticipate** their reaction. What's the best you can hope for? The worst you might have to deal with?
- **Prepare** by informing yourself about HIV disease. You may want to leave articles or a hotline phone number for the person you tell.
- **Get support.** Talk it over with someone you trust, and come up with a plan.

- **Accept** the reaction. You can't control how others will deal with your news.

## SPECIAL SITUATIONS

### People You May Have Exposed to HIV:

It can be very difficult to disclose your status to sexual partners or people you shared needles with. However, it is very important that they know so they can decide to get tested and, if they test positive, get the health care they need. The Department of Health can tell people you might have exposed, without using your name.

**Employers:** You may want to tell your employer if your HIV illness or treatments interfere with your job performance. Get a letter from your doctor that explains what you need to do for your health (taking medications, rest periods, etc.). Talk with your boss or personnel director. Tell them you want to continue working, and what changes may be needed in your schedule or workload. Make sure they understand if you want to keep your HIV status confidential.

People with disabilities are protected from job discrimination under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). As long as you can do the essential functions of your job, your employer cannot legally discriminate against you because of your HIV status. When you apply for a new job, employers are not allowed to ask about your health or any disabilities. They can only legally ask if you have any condition that would interfere with essential job functions.

**Family Members:** It can be difficult to decide whether to tell your parents, children, or other relatives that you are HIV-positive. Many people fear that their relatives will be hurt or angry. Others feel that *not* telling relatives will weaken their relationships and may keep them from getting the emotional support and love that they want. It can be very stressful to keep an important secret from people you are close to.

Family members may want to know how you were exposed to HIV. Decide if or how you will answer questions about how you got infected.

Your relatives may appreciate knowing that you are getting good health care, that you are taking care of yourself, and about your support network.

**Health Care Providers:** It's your decision whether or not to tell a health care provider that you have HIV. If your providers, including dentists, know you have HIV, they should be able to give you more appropriate health care. All providers should protect themselves from diseases carried in patients' blood. If providers are likely to come in contact with your blood, you can remind them to put gloves on.

**Social Contacts: Dating:** can be very threatening for people with HIV. Fear of rejection keeps many people from talking about their HIV status. Remember, every situation is different and you don't have to tell everybody. If you aren't going to be in a situation where HIV could be transmitted, there's no need to tell. Sooner or later in a relationship, it will be important to talk about your HIV status. The longer you wait, the more difficult it gets.

**An HIV-Positive Child's School:** It is best to have good communication about your child's HIV status. Meet with the principal and discuss the school's policy and attitude on HIV. Meet with the nurse and your child's teacher. Be sure to talk about your child's legal right to confidentiality.

## GETTING HELP

You can get help with telling others about your HIV status from the counselors at the HIV anonymous test sites, or your HIV case manager.

*Reviewed March 31, 2011*