

ABOUT HIV

Telling other people that you have HIV

If you've just been told you have HIV, you may be feeling upset or confused. You may want to share that with other people. But it's probably not a good idea to rush into telling lots of people that you have HIV before you've got used to the news yourself.

Although you will still be able to tell people later on, you can never 'un-tell' someone.

On the other hand, telling the right person can be a very positive experience. It can help you to get support when you most need it, and it can sometimes make relationships stronger.

How will they react?

For each person who you are thinking of telling, ask yourself what you are hoping to achieve by telling them. Try thinking about how they will feel on hearing the news. Imagine the best way they could react – and the worst.

You may also want to think about the best time and place to raise the subject, and make sure that you only tell people you can trust to keep it to themselves.

Did you tell anyone that you were going to have an HIV test? If you did, it's worth thinking about how you'll answer their questions.



Telling family and friends

Whether to tell family and friends may depend on the type of relationship you have with them. If you don't usually discuss personal matters, do you want to talk about this?

But there may be somebody you're close to who has been helpful in the past. Is there someone calm, supportive and trustworthy you could turn to now?

Generally, people's reactions will depend on what they know, or think they know, about the subject. There are lots of fears and myths associated with HIV. Some people you tell could be hostile or unkind.

Sometimes people do not know much about HIV, or have lots of questions. You might find it useful to have fact sheets about HIV to hand to provide reassurance.

Other people may surprise you with their understanding and acceptance.

Telling your current partner

If you are in a relationship at the moment, telling your partner might open up a crucial source of support.

On the other hand, it could be a difficult situation for both you and your partner to deal with. It may take some time for you and your partner to work through the issues that come up.

There may be concerns about whether you could have passed HIV on to your partner, or whether you could in the future. Equally, there's also the possibility that it was your partner who passed HIV on to you. It's important that your partner gets tested for HIV now – staff at your HIV clinic can help with this.

Some people face particularly difficult situations. You may rely on your partner for money or be worried about violence.

You may want some help or support to think these issues through. This should be available through a local support group or from your HIV clinic.

Telling a new partner

Telling sexual partners, or potential partners, can be daunting. You might be worried about being rejected if you tell someone you have HIV.

Being open about having HIV can mean that you can work out together how you will reduce the risk of HIV transmission. But it could be – if you're not going to have sex that involves any risk of HIV transmission – that you don't see the need to tell your partners.

You do need to think about the law, especially if there is a risk of HIV being passed on.

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A collaboration between: NAM aidsmap, European AIDS Treatment Group, Aids Action Europe, East Europe & Central Asia Union of PLWH and ITPCru (The Treatment Preparedness Coalition).

For more information: www.about-hiv.info; www.pro-vich.info; www.aidsmap.com

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Timing can be important. It can be difficult to talk about HIV when you have only just met someone, but putting it off may cause problems later on. Some people find it easier when the first contact is online, rather than face to face.

You can get advice from a local support group or from your HIV clinic.



Work and travel

As a general rule, your employer does not need to know about your HIV status – it rarely affects people's ability to do their job.

If you're worried about gossip being spread, you may want to keep the news to yourself. On the other hand, if your employer knows, it may be easier to have time off for appointments or to deal with periods of sickness.

People living with HIV are able to travel to most countries of the world. But some countries have restrictions, most often for people applying for a work or resident's visa. As well as many countries in the Middle East, this includes Russia and Australia.

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