

A step-by-step guide to telling
your partners that they may have HIV.

**THERE'S
SOMETHING
I NEED
TO TELL
YOU.**

This booklet is for you if you have HIV and are thinking about how to let your partners know that they may have HIV, too.

This booklet will:

- help you weigh the pros and cons of talking to your sex and needle-sharing partners yourself.
- help you make a step-by-step plan for talking to your partners.
- tell you about other ways to let your partners know they should get tested for HIV if you do not want to talk to them yourself.

Who are my “partners”?

Your partners are:

- **people you have had sex with.** “Sex” includes vaginal, anal, or oral sex.
- **people you have shared needles or works with** to inject drugs, hormones, steroids, or even vitamins or medicine.

What do my partners need to know?

- that they **may have HIV.**
- that they should **get an HIV test.**

They need to know this so that they can:

- find out if they have HIV as soon as possible.
- get medical care if they do have HIV. Treatments can help people with HIV live longer, healthier lives.
- learn how to prevent giving HIV to other people.

This booklet will take you through seven steps for making a plan to talk to your partners. For each step, there is an exercise you can do on your own or with your doctor, counselor or HIV case manager to help you get ready.

By letting your partners know they may be infected, you are helping stop the spread of HIV.

Should I tell anyone else about my HIV?

It is a good idea to tell health care providers, like your doctor and dentist, so they can give you the medical care you need. You may also decide to talk about your HIV with other people, like friends, family, or coworkers. These people can support you by coming with you to medical appointments, reminding you when it is time to take pills, helping you when you are tired, or just being there to listen. Although this booklet focuses on telling partners, you can also use the seven steps to make a plan for talking about your HIV with other people.

Get the support you need

Dealing with HIV can be stressful. You don't have to go through this alone. Think about who you can talk with comfortably about your HIV and who can give you support when you need it. Some ideas are:

- an HIV case manager
- a counselor
- a member of the clergy
- your doctor
- a friend
- a relative

New York State also has a free program called **PNAP (PartNer Assistance Program)** to help you through the process of letting partners know that they should get tested for HIV. In New York City, the program is called **CNAP (Contact Notification Assistance Program)**. **PNAP/CNAP** counselors can help in many ways:

- They can help you plan what to say to your partners and where and when to say it.
- They can be with you when you tell your partners.
- They can even tell your partners for you. They will not share your name or any other information about you. They will just tell your partners that they may have HIV and should get an HIV test.

PNAP and CNAP are free, safe, private, and helpful. Call toll-free **1-800-541-AIDS** to find a PNAP counselor near you. Or, in New York City, call toll-free **1-888-792-1711** for CNAP.

What New York State law says about telling your partners

When you test positive for HIV, your doctor must talk to you about why it is important to let your partners know they should get an HIV test. Your doctor will tell you about three choices:

- You can tell your partners yourself.
- You can tell your partners with help from your doctor or a PNAP/CNAP counselor.
- You can ask PNAP/CNAP to tell your partners for you without sharing your name.

If your doctor knows the names of any of your partners (like your wife or husband), or if you tell your doctor the names of your partners, he or she has to give those names to the Health Department. You do not have to give your partners' names to your doctor if you do not want to. You and your doctor will talk about the best way to tell your partners that they should get an HIV test.

Your doctor will also ask you whether telling could cause a partner to hurt you or someone else. You and your doctor will wait to tell that partner until you are sure you will be safe.

Seven Steps to Telling

Follow the seven steps below to make a plan for telling your partners. The approach you use to talk to one partner may not be the same approach you choose for another partner. Go through the steps for each person you need to tell to come up with the best plan for talking to that person.

Step 1: Weigh the pros and cons of telling your partner yourself.

Step 2: Get ready to share the facts about HIV.

Step 3: Decide if you want help telling your partner and who will help you.

Step 4: Find the right time and place.

Step 5: Plan what you will say.

Step 6: Prepare for how your partner will react.

Step 7: Get extra support after telling your partner.

Step One: Weigh the pros and cons of telling your partner yourself.

Many people want to tell their partners themselves. There are some good reasons for this, like:

- You can build trust with your partner.
- You can help and support your partner through getting an HIV test and learning the results.
- You can let your partner help and support you.
- You can be open about your HIV infection.

In some cases, it might be better **not** to tell a partner yourself:

- Don't tell a partner yourself if you think the person may get angry and hurt you or someone else (like a child).
- Don't tell a partner yourself if you do not know the person very well and are not sure how they will react—especially if you think he or she could get violent.

Or, you may just not be ready to talk to a partner yourself. That's okay—PNAP/CNAP can tell your partner that he or she should be tested for HIV without ever sharing your name.

Exercise 1: Pros and Cons

Pros: What are some reasons to tell this partner yourself?

example: I want my partner to know that I care about him (or her).

Cons: What are some reasons NOT to tell this partner yourself?

example: I'm afraid my partner will tell other people, and I'm not ready for that yet.

You may want to talk about these pros and cons with a counselor or HIV case manager.

If you decide you do not want to talk to this partner yourself, remember that PNAP/CNAP can do it for you without sharing your name. Call 1-800-541-AIDS for PNAP, or in New York City, 1-888-792-1711 for CNAP.

Step Two: Get ready to share the facts about HIV.

When you tell people that you have HIV, they will probably have questions. Here are some basic facts about HIV to help you answer them.

How do people get HIV?

Most people get HIV by:

- **Having sex with a person who has HIV***, without using a condom. You can get HIV during vaginal, anal, or oral sex.
 - **Sharing needles or works with a person who has HIV***. HIV is passed through blood in shared needles and other equipment used to inject drugs, steroids, hormones, or even vitamins or medicines.
- * Remember, you can't tell by looking whether a partner has HIV. Many people with HIV do not know that they have it.

Also, **women with HIV can give it to their babies when they are pregnant or breastfeeding.** There are medicines a woman with HIV and her newborn can take that will greatly lower the chance that the baby will have HIV.

How can I find out if I have HIV?

The only way to find out if you have HIV is to get an HIV test. You can have a blood test or an oral (mouth) test. The oral test does not use a needle.

At some clinics, you can get tested for HIV without ever giving your name. This is called an “anonymous” HIV test.

Usually, it takes one to two weeks to get the results of your HIV test. At some clinics and doctors' offices, you can get a “rapid HIV test,” which takes only 20 minutes to get results. If your rapid HIV test is positive, it will be sent to a laboratory to check again, and you will get your final result in about two days.

If I have HIV, does that mean I have AIDS?

Testing positive for HIV does not mean that you have AIDS. **HIV** is a virus that attacks the immune system. Over time, without treatment, a person with HIV gets less and less able to fight off illnesses. **AIDS** is a late stage of HIV infection. A person with HIV has AIDS when the immune system gets very weak or when the person gets certain illnesses linked with HIV.

Medicines that fight HIV can delay AIDS for years. It is important to get tested for HIV so that if you are infected, you can get treatment and care to help you stay healthy longer.

How can I avoid giving HIV to anyone else?

- Use a latex male condom or a female condom every time you have sex. If you always use them and use them correctly, condoms **greatly lower** the chance of passing HIV.
- Never share needles or any other equipment you use to inject drugs, steroids, hormones, or anything else.
- If you are pregnant or thinking about having a baby, talk to your doctor about medicines you can take to lower the chance that your baby will have HIV.

If you have HIV, using condoms is important for your health, too. Condoms protect you from most STDs and from getting “re-infected” with another kind of HIV.

Call the **New York State Department of Health HIV/AIDS Hotline** to get more information about HIV/AIDS and to find out where to get an HIV test without giving your name:

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------|
| 1-800-541-AIDS | English |
| 1-800-233-SIDA | Spanish |
| 1-800-369-AIDS | Deaf/TDD |

Exercise 2: Be Ready for Questions

What questions about HIV do you think your partner might ask?

example: How will I know if I have HIV?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

What are the answers to those questions?

example: You should get an HIV test. Here's a number you can call for an appointment.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

If you thought of questions you can't answer, ask your doctor, HIV case manager, or counselor for help. You can also use the resources listed on page 20. You may want to give these resources to your partner, too.

Step Three: Decide if you want help telling your partner and who will help you.

Choosing to tell your partner yourself does not mean you have to do it alone. Think about whether you want someone to help you. Here are a few ideas:

- You can ask an HIV case manager, doctor, or counselor to be with you when you tell your partner.
- You can ask a PNAP or CNAP counselor to be with you when you tell your partner.
- If you are in a drug treatment program, you can ask your substance abuse counselor to be with you when you tell your partner.
- You can ask someone else you trust who knows about HIV to be with you when you tell your partner.

These people can help by answering your partner's questions about HIV. They can support you if you get nervous or upset. If you are worried that your partner could get angry but still want to tell him or her yourself, you may want to have someone with you to make sure you do not get hurt.

Exercise 3: Telling Alone, or Telling with Help

What are some reasons to tell your partner alone?

example: I feel like this is too private for anyone else to be there.

What are some reasons to have someone else with you when you tell?

example: I will feel stronger if someone is there to support me.

Who could you ask to be with you when you tell your partner?

example: My HIV case manager.

What is your decision?

I want to tell my partner alone.

I want someone to be with me when I tell my partner.

I will ask _____ to be there.

They can help by _____.

Step 4: Find the right place and time.

Where and when you tell your partner can make a big difference. Here are some tips for choosing the right place and time.

Talk to your partner in a **place**:

- where both you and your partner will be comfortable.
- where no one will interrupt you. Turn off the ringer on your phone so that you can talk without being disturbed.
- that is private, where no one will overhear you.
- that is not too far away from others, so you can get help if you need it.

Talk to your partner at a **time**:

- when you will have enough time to say everything you need to say.
- when you will have enough time for your partner to respond and ask questions.
- when your partner can call right away to set up an HIV test. Most testing sites are open Monday through Friday during the day.
- when you can talk to your counselor, doctor, clergy, or another support person right after you tell your partner.

Exercise 4: Where and When to Tell

What are some **places** where you could tell your partner?

1. _____
Is this place: comfortable for both of you?
 private?
 not too far from others if you need help?
2. _____
Is this place: comfortable for both of you?
 private?
 not too far from others if you need help?
3. _____
Is this place: comfortable for both of you?
 private?
 not too far from others if you need help?

A place with all 3 boxes checked is probably a good choice.

When could you tell your partner?

1. _____
 Will you have enough time?
 Will your partner be able to make an appointment for an HIV test right away?
 Will you be able to talk to someone for support right away?
2. _____
 Will you have enough time?
 Will your partner be able to make an appointment for an HIV test right away?
 Will you be able to talk to someone for support right away?
3. _____
 Will you have enough time?
 Will your partner be able to make an appointment for an HIV test right away?
 Will you be able to talk to someone for support right away?

A time with all three boxes checked is probably a good choice.

What is your decision?

The place where I am going to talk to my partner is:

The time that I am going to talk to my partner is:

Step 5: Plan what you will say.

You may be nervous about telling your partner that he or she may have HIV. That's normal. Before it is time to talk to your partner, think about what you will say and exactly how you will start. Write down the first few sentences, and practice saying them out loud to yourself or to a friend, counselor, or HIV case manager. Practicing can help keep you from feeling "tongue-tied" when you talk to your partner for real.

However you say it, when you tell a partner yourself, you need to let him or her know at least three things:

1. You have HIV.
2. Your partner may also have HIV.
3. Your partner should get an HIV test.

Depending on your relationship with your partner, you may also want to include other points:

- Explain why you are telling your partner that he or she may have HIV. For example, "I care about you and want you to stay healthy, so you need to know about this."
- Explain why it is important for your partner to get tested. For example, "There are medicines that help people with HIV stay healthier. You should get tested right away so that if you have HIV, you can get treatment and care."
- Express your support. For example, "Getting an HIV test can be stressful. I am here for you if you need help."
- Share information about your medical condition. "My doctor says I will probably need to start taking HIV medicine soon. That will help keep me healthier. I plan to be around for a long time."

Finally, think about how you felt when you first tested positive for HIV.

What did people say that helped you?

Exercise 5: Finding the Words

You may be nervous about talking to your partner. Knowing exactly how you will start can help you feel more prepared when the time comes. This exercise will help you plan the first few things you will say.

Think about ways you could begin the conversation. Write down any phrases or sentences that come to mind. Don't think too much about it, and don't worry about how they fit together—just write down all the ideas you have.

Now, look over the ideas you came up with. On the lines below, use the ideas you like best to write two or three sentences to say when you start talking to your partner.

Now, practice saying these sentences out loud. You can practice on your own or with a friend, counselor, or HIV case manager.

Step 6: Prepare for how your partner will react.

It is hard to know how your partners will react when you tell them that they should get tested for HIV. They may be relieved that you are telling them. They may be angry or scared. They may be sad. They may yell or cry, or they may say nothing at all. They may react in all of these ways. It is a good idea to plan how you will handle different reactions. Here are some things to think about:

- Remember how you felt when you were told that you have HIV. How did you react? Your partner may feel the same way.
- Bring phone numbers with you to share with your partner. Helpful numbers might be the HIV/AIDS hotline, the number of your counselor or clergy, or the number for PNAP/CNAP. Some important phone numbers are listed on page 20.
- Telling a partner may change your relationship. Sometimes people stay together and work through this. Sometimes they don't. Your partner may want some time and space to decide how he or she feels. Be understanding and let your partner know that you care and are there to help. Get the support you need to help you through changes in the relationship.

No matter how your partner reacts, remember that you are sharing important information to protect his or her health. Telling is an act of caring and concern.

Exercise 6: Preparing for your Partner's Reactions

On the left column, write down ways that your partner might react when you tell him or her about your HIV. Then, on the right column, write down ways that you could handle that reaction.

If my partner...	Then I will...
example: yells and gets mad	example: not yell back. I will ask my partner if we can take a break and talk again when we are both more calm.

If you are working with a counselor or HIV case manager, try acting out some of the situations above. You can take turns playing the role of your partner. You can combine this exercise with Exercise 5 to practice the whole conversation. This can help you feel more prepared when you talk to your partner for real.

Step 7: Plan to get support after telling your partner.

It is hard to know how you will feel after talking to your partner. You may feel relieved. You may feel upset or very emotional. Telling partners can be hard, and it will help if you have someone to talk to right away. A counselor, HIV case manager, or PNAP/CNAP counselor can help you cope with your feelings and reactions.

Exercise 7: Getting Support

Who are some people who can give you extra support after you tell your partner?

example: my counselor

Circle the person above you will plan to talk to after you tell your partner.

Below are some ways you could make sure you will be able to reach this person when you need them. Check the one you will use.

- I will make an appointment with this person for the day I tell my partner.
- I will schedule a phone call with this person for the day I tell my partner.
- I will ask this person if there is a phone number where he or she can be reached if I need to talk right away.
- Another way: _____

If you can't get the words out...

Sometimes, talking to a partner goes just the way you planned. Other times, you may plan to talk to a partner but feel too nervous or emotional to go through with it. That's okay. Make a new plan and try again.

If you have tried to tell a partner several times but haven't been able to do it, think about other ways to let your partner know that he or she may have HIV and should get tested.

- You can ask someone you trust who knows about HIV to be with you when you talk to your partner. Exercise 3, on page 10, can help you explore this idea.
- You can ask PNAP/CNAP to tell your partner for you without ever telling your name. Just call **1-800-541-AIDS** for PNAP, or in New York City, call **1-888-792-1711** for CNAP.

Resources

Dealing with HIV can be hard, but you don't have to do it alone. There are many resources you can turn to for information and support.

Telephone Hotlines

New York State Department of Health HIV/AIDS Hotline

Call these hotlines for information about HIV/AIDS, to find out where to get an HIV test, or to find counseling and health care for people with HIV.

1-800-541-AIDS English
1-800-233-SIDA Spanish
1-800-369-AIDS Deaf/TDD

You can ask them anything, and you do not have to give your name.

PNAP/CNAP

For help telling partners that they should get tested for HIV, call Monday – Friday, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.:

In New York City, CNAP: **1-888-792-1711**
Statewide outside New York City, PNAP: **1-800-541-2437**

Domestic Violence

If your partner has hurt you or you are afraid he or she will, these hotlines can help you:

New York State Domestic Violence Hotline: **1-800-942-6906**
New York City Domestic Violence Hotline: **1-800-621-HOPE**
New York City Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project: **212-714-1141**

Mental Health and Substance Use

In New York City, for help with drug or alcohol abuse, depression, or other mental health problems, call: **1-800-LIFENET**

In New York State, for information about drug treatment programs, call the New York State Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS), Monday - Friday, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.: **1-800-522-5353**

Educational materials

For an order form for educational materials about HIV/AIDS from the New York State Department of Health, call **(518) 474-9866** or send an e-mail to **HIVPUBS@health.state.ny.us**.

All materials are free to people who live in New York State.

Websites

There are many resources on the internet. If you do not have internet access, try your local library. Most libraries have computers with internet access that you can use for free, and they can show you what to do if you need help. Librarians are not required to keep your HIV status private, but you do not need to tell them what information you are looking for or which websites you plan to view. Try these websites:

New York State Department of Health: **www.health.state.ny.us**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Prevention

Information Network: **www.cdcnpin.org**

The Body: **www.thebody.com**

HIV and Hepatitis Information: **www.hivandhepatitis.com**

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