

Disclosing Your HIV-Positive Status

What does “disclosing my HIV-positive status” mean?

Disclosing your HIV-positive status means telling someone else that you are HIV-positive. Disclosing your HIV status to another person is often difficult, whether you’re disclosing to a sexual partner, someone you inject drugs with, a friend, family member, employer or anyone else you decide to tell.

Can I still have sex if I have HIV or AIDS?

Yes. People living with HIV/AIDS are entitled to an active, healthy sex life. Following are some things you need to consider.

Do I have to disclose my HIV status before having sex?

The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that you must tell your sexual partner that you are HIV-positive before having anal or vaginal intercourse (fucking) without a condom because these activities are high risk for transmitting HIV.

The Supreme Court ruling *may* also mean that you must disclose your HIV-positive status when engaging in lower risk activities (like oral sex). Whether the ruling applies to these lower risk activities is not yet clear. Low risk sexual activities carry some risk of transmitting HIV, so it is always legally safer to disclose your HIV status to sexual partners if possible.

What if the person I am having sex with doesn’t want to use condoms?

If your sexual partner does not want to use condoms it is up to you to decide whether you are comfortable putting another person at risk of HIV infection. This may also mean you are putting yourself at risk for potential new infections. Your partner must make his or her decision voluntarily, without coercion. He or she must also understand the risk of HIV transmission and not be under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

If I inject drugs, do I have to disclose my HIV status to the people I inject drugs with?

If you inject drugs, it is important that you use a clean needle, syringe and other injecting equipment (such as spoons) every time. Sharing injecting equipment with another person is high risk for transmitting HIV. If you do share injecting equipment with another person, then you must first tell him or her that you are HIV-positive. If he or she decides to share injecting equipment anyway, the same rules apply as if the decision was to have sex without a condom. The person you are going to inject drugs with must make his or her decision voluntarily,

understand the risk of HIV transmission and must not be under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

What is the best way to disclose my HIV status before having sex or injecting drugs?

It is usually easier to tell someone you are HIV-positive before getting ready to have sex or inject drugs. Think over what you want to say, why you want to say it, and how you want to say it so you'll feel more prepared when you disclose your status.

Do I have to disclose my HIV status to people other than sexual partners or people I inject drugs with?

No. However, by disclosing your HIV status to friends or family, you can build a support network and feel less alone about being HIV-positive. Choosing the right time and place to disclose to others is important. You may feel vulnerable right after you disclose and you need to be prepared for both positive and negative reactions from the people you disclose to.

You will need to decide whether you can trust someone with the knowledge that you are HIV-positive. Telling others you are HIV-positive means you have less control over how that information is shared. Be clear with anyone you disclose to whether it is okay for them to tell other people that you are HIV-positive. Providing the people you disclose to with written information about HIV/AIDS can often be helpful.

Disclosing your HIV status to some people, such as employers or insurers, can sometimes lead to discrimination. It is important to think carefully about what might happen if you disclose your HIV status to anyone who might discriminate against you.

Is there anywhere I can go to talk about disclosing my HIV status?

Yes. Counselling is available at many community-based AIDS organizations, public health units, or HIV outpatient clinics. You may also want to talk to your doctor about any questions or concerns you might have. **You do not have to deal with this issue on your own.** To find out where you can get local help in dealing with HIV disclosure, contact the AIDS Hotline at 1-800-668-2437.