

Disclosure:

The issue of disclosure is complicated. There is no one answer that applies to every single person. Clients are encouraged to consider factors including safety, support, and immediate consequences before making the decision to disclose to anyone in their personal life.

Do I HAVE to disclose my status to others?

Research about HIV health outcomes has shown that clients who have support tend to have better health outcomes than patients without support, so identifying a safe zone of disclosure is often recommended. Disclosure should be with people you know to be supportive; preferably someone who can help you learn on your healthcare journey.

Do I have to tell my dentist?

In most states, there is no law that requires that you disclose your status to your dentist. However, there are several reasons why you should consider doing so. First, your dentist will be in a position to provide you better treatment if they know your status. Second, there may be programs that provide free dental care if you are HIV positive. Accessing such services requires disclosure/proof of status in order to qualify. Third, many illnesses are linked to oral health. It's far more likely that you will avoid complications in treatment if the dentist knows your status. Fourth, your dentist has the same legal and ethical obligation to safeguard your status as your care and treatment provider. Find a dentist with whom you feel comfortable disclosing your status.

Do I have to tell my sexual partners or needle sharing partners?

CDC recommends you disclose your status to sexual partners or needle sharing partners, if no one else in your personal life. There are a number of states in which it is required by law and could result in jail time if you fail to disclose your status. There are many resources available to negative partners, including Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). This medication prevents negative sex partners from getting HIV from their positive partners.

How can I know if I can trust the person I disclose to?

There are no shortcuts to developing trust. We can never predict how someone will react to news about one's health or well-being. Because disclosure has legal consequences, it is better to wait to engage in sexual relations/needle sharing until you feel that you can trust that person. Think about how they have treated you. How do you feel when you are together? If there is tension, problems with boundaries, inconsistency in your relationship or aggression, that is probably not the person to disclose to immediately post diagnosis. Prioritize your own health and well-being. If you can easily identify people that you trust completely, start with those individual(s). Many people develop confidence over time that makes disclosure an easier task in a variety of contexts.

Is it safe to disclose?

The answer to this question depends on the context in which you are considering disclosing.

How do I disclose my status to my loved ones?

Put your own health and well-being first. Make sure that you have a firm understanding of your condition, treatment and prognosis before you disclose. Your family and friends will probably have questions and it will be a better process for you if you are prepared with some answers. Practice with a medical case manager or in a support group with other people who are living with HIV. Hear their experiences; get their advice. Choose a quiet, private setting and read the room. If the energy in the room is off, wait until another time. Be prepared to let them know how they can support you.

How do I deal with sympathy/people treating me differently after I've disclosed?

Even if you are newly diagnosed, there is a good chance that you know a lot more about what it means to be living with HIV than your immediate family or friends. Many people have limited information about HIV or think about tv and news from the 80s. Much has changed in the world of care and treatment since that time and the prognosis is normal for people who adhere to treatment. You may need to educate those closest to you about what it means, and what is no longer true about having a positive HIV status. People LIVE with HIV. Prepare some bullet points for those times when you are around the sympathetic prone.