
a series of fact sheets written
by experts in the field of liver
disease

HCV and Work-Related Issues: A Guide for Employers and Coworkers

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Foreword

Millions of Americans live with chronic hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection. There may be someone in your workplace who has HCV. You cannot tell by looking at someone if he or she has this virus.

You may have some questions or concerns about working with someone who has HCV. You may feel afraid of HCV or wonder if you can get it. It is human nature to fear illness, especially an illness you know nothing about. However, there is no reason to fear HCV. The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide accurate information and reassurance to those working with someone who has HCV.

What is HCV?

HCV is a virus that primarily affects the liver. Over time, HCV can damage the liver and health of an individual. Although potentially life threatening, the vast majority of those with HCV will die **with** it and not **of** HCV.

HCV symptoms are vague because they are similar to many other medical conditions. Some people have little or no symptoms. The most commonly reported one is fatigue. Body aches, flu-like symptoms, depression, and abdominal discomfort are also symptoms of HCV. Some patients report difficulty concentrating or that their thinking feels cloudy.

HCV Transmission

HCV transmission in the workplace is largely unheard of. HCV is passed via blood-to-blood contact. HCV is not transmitted by hugging, kissing, sneezing, coughing, sharing eating utensils or glasses, sharing toilet facilities or by casual contact. There is no vaccine against HCV.

People with occupations that require direct contact with blood should follow government and workplace safety guidelines. The rate of infection for those in healthcare occupations is close to that of the general population. Safety precautions protect patients who might come into contact with an HCV-positive healthcare worker.

The HCV Patient During Treatment

HCV treatment medications may cause many side effects. Some common ones are fatigue, irritability, depression, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, insomnia, itching, rashes, stomach upsets, headaches, fevers, and body aches. These side effects are temporary and they will reverse with time after HCV treatment is stopped. HCV treatment is usually 24 to 48 weeks, although some people need longer or shorter courses of treatment.

How You Can Help

The extent that HCV interferes with the health and daily living of individuals varies. Your coworker or employee may be facing challenges relating to HCV and its treatment. The best thing you can do is try to support your coworker. Most

patients appreciate support, particularly in the workplace.

The next step is to treat your HCV-positive coworker with the same dignity and respect you had before you knew about his or her HCV status. There is no need to act any differently just because of this. Show kindness and tolerance. If appropriate, ask your coworker if you can help in any way. This is especially important if the coworker is on treatment or has advanced disease.

Your coworker may be irritable or short-tempered during treatment. This may even happen to someone who is ordinarily calm. Do not take this personally. Although it is unlikely to occur, abuse in the workplace is never alright. You may be able to prevent a more serious situation from developing by trying to make workplace accommodations as soon as you notice moodiness in your employee. Perhaps your employee needs daily rest periods, shorter hours, an earlier or later start time, or a lighter workload. Your coworker is going through a great deal and would probably appreciate help on the job.

Patients often “look good” during treatment. This can create problems, especially if the patient feels awful and assumes everyone around him can see this. Do not assume that because someone “looks good” that they feel good.

Keep confidential information to yourself. Do not disclose your coworker’s HCV status to other employees. It is especially important to maintain confidentiality if you learned about a coworker’s HCV status through a third person. You may have heard false information. Unless someone self-discloses, it is none of your business.

You are showing support by picking up this factsheet and getting information. We hope that this information is useful. If you have more questions, you can find accurate information at the Hepatitis C Support Project’s website: www.hcvadvocate.org.

For more information:

- Americans with Disabilities Act
www.ada.gov
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov
- Hepatitis C Support Project
www.hcvadvocate.org
- U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration
www.osha.gov


Be Sure to Check out the Following Publications:

- *Stigma and Hepatitis C*
www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/Stigma%20Guide.pdf
- *A Guide to Hepatitis C Disclosure*
www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/Disclosure%20Guide%202011.pdf
- *Dispelling Myths about HCV*
www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/Myths.pdf

For more information about hepatitis C, hepatitis B and HCV coinfections, please visit www.hcvadvocate.org.

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