Tell partner I think I have HIV? [1]

Dear Alice,

I think I have HIV but am unsure how to tell my partner. We are gay (guys). How would be the best way to tell him???

Answer

Dear Reader,

Breaking the news to your partner that you may have HIV can be very daunting. There are many ways to broach the topic, and many factors to consider including timing, location, and the manner in which you communicate most comfortably.

You mention that you think you have HIV. It's not clear if you are basing this on a previous sexual experience, knowledge about a former partner, if you are having physical symptoms, or if you've tested positive. There are many resources to find out more information and also get tested for HIV. You can try contacting your city or state Department of Health to find testing sites. Planned Parenthood [2] also offers confidential and sometimes free testing in many places throughout the country.

Once you've confirmed your status with testing (if you haven't already), it's time to consider a conversation. Often it's helpful to pick a time and place where you and your partner will both be calm. Before talking, you could write down a few different ways to break the news ("I want to tell you something?" or "I've received some test results?" or "I have news, it's important we talk?"), and then pick the one that feels most natural at the time. Be prepared for your partner to be upset, sad, overwhelmed, and/or unable to have a prolonged discussion right away. People often need time to process the news that a loved one has HIV. After the news has time to settle, you and your partner may wish to discuss a range of issues, such as the risks of transmission, safer sex strategies, how this impacts your day-to-day life, whether you'll begin treatment, and how you can best support each other.

You certainly don't have to tell everyone in your life that you think you may have HIV, but in many states it is actually law that you disclose your HIV status to anyone to whom you could potentially transmit the virus. You may also wish to consider the nature of your relationship? do you and your partner have sex that would be considered high risk for transmitting HIV (for two men, an example would be anal sex without condoms)? Is there any chance you would be putting yourself in danger by telling your partner? For a host of reasons, and despite legal considerations, some people living with HIV choose not to tell their sexual partner(s) about
their status. It may be best to speak with an HIV test counselor about your relationship and how best to manage the news of having HIV. Telling your partner you may have HIV probably won't be as easy as the other things you might discuss in your relationship, but letting him know your HIV status could enable him to make well-informed decisions about his own health and safety, as well as to offer you the support you need while you are going through testing and diagnosis.

Alice!
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Sexual & Reproductive Health
Safer Sex
Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's)
HIV/AIDS

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Resources
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Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside)
Medical Services (CUMC)
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