

# PREVENTING STIGMA

## Parenting an Athletic Child with Viral Hepatitis

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### *A Parent's Perspective*

#### **Preventing the Stigma of the Hepatitis Kid**

By Anonymous Parent

Our doctor told us all about the stigma associated with viral hepatitis, and we knew we didn't want that for Jake, our very athletic 6 year-old son. At the same time, we were very concerned about Jake, who's a perpetual motion machine!

He's involved in a lot of sports and sometimes that means bruises and blood. It's just the nature of the game. We wanted to protect Jake's privacy but we also wanted to prevent any possible blood transfers. For a while we weren't sure what to do.

Then my wife ran across an article in a magazine that said most people who have viral hepatitis don't even know they have it. It was like hitting the jackpot! We took copies of the article to our son's school, showed it to his teacher, his coaches and everybody we could think of. We didn't tell them that Jake had hepatitis. We just said that we were very concerned about the possibility that kids could have a bloodborne disease without knowing it and that we wanted to make sure that the people around Jake always used standard precautions.

Some did—the school employees for example—but some, including the coaches, didn't. However, once we presented our research and our concerns (and followed up on a regular basis) the grownups started using standard precautions regularly.

That was when we realized that Jake's viral hepatitis wasn't the problem and shouldn't have been our focus when it came to talking with other people. The virus was the problem and the virus should have been our focus.

If we can get people to acknowledge that the virus is out there and get them to protect themselves not from kids but from the virus, everything will be all right. Yes, Jake will still be a kid who has hepatitis but he won't be stigmatized as The Hepatitis Kid.

