

BREAKING THE NEWS

Telling the Truth

A Parent's Perspective

Telling My Daughter About Hepatitis B

By Joni R.

I told Loredana when she was about 5 or 6 that she “had a little sickness in her liver.”

I figured she should be told something as to why she had to have blood samples taken regularly and also why she had a liver biopsy when she was 5. I told her she was allergic to alcohol and sushi (raw fish) because it could hurt her liver.

When she was about 9 years old, I felt it was time to tell her the truth. I told her there was a name for the sickness in her liver and that it was called hepatitis B. I told her that we weren't sure where she got it, that it could have come from a used needle in the orphanage or her birthmother. I told her we would never know for sure.

I assured her that living in the United States gave her the best opportunity for medical care. We talked about what she has to do to keep her liver healthy. She really didn't have a lot of questions at the beginning. She did want to know if she could die from it. I told her that it was a possibility, but if she took good care of her body and didn't drink alcohol that chances are her health would be just fine.

I assured her that there were new drugs coming out all the time to help those with hepatitis. I also told her about the different types of hepatitis. We have a neighbor with hepatitis C, so she understood.

I told her about her hepatitis shortly before a regular visit to her pediatric gastroenterologist. I wanted her to have the opportunity to ask her doctor questions. The specialist essentially told her the same things I had.

My daughter and I also spoke at length about how hepatitis was transmitted. We talked about not sharing toothbrushes, razors and other items. Because my daughter is now

almost 12, we have spoken about how hepatitis is transmitted through sexual intercourse. She has not started her period yet, but I have spoken to her briefly about disposing of the pads and tampons.

The other touchy subject we discussed was the aspect of whom to tell and not tell. This is a tough one. I told her it would be better if she didn't tell anyone because some parents wouldn't understand and might not want their kids to play with her.

She went and told her best friend anyway! This little girl happens to come from a wonderful family and we are friends with the parents. I then felt I had to tell them. They were great about it and are actually Loredana's godparents now. The little girl has told no one thus far.

About three months ago as I put Loredana to bed, she started crying and said she didn't want to have hepatitis. My heart broke for her and I started crying with her. Then about a month later we found out the e antigen had turned negative and that she had developed the e antibody.

Talking to kids about this is really tough. We each have to do it in the way we think our kids can best handle it. I have always felt that in order to have a really trusting relationship with my daughter I have to be honest with her.