Billy Porter Says He's Been Living With HIV Since 2007 [VIDEO]

"It's time to put my big boy pants on and talk," Billy Porter tells The Hollywood Reporter about his HIV status.

May 19, 2021 By Trent Straube

"The world needs to know what HIV positive looks like," award-winning actor and singer Billy Porter tells The Hollywood Reporter in an exclusive cover story and video in which the star of TV's Pose and Broadway's Kinky Boots discloses he has been living with HIV since 2007.

Bill Porter in a scene from "Pose"

"Yes, I am the statistic," he says, referencing the fact that he is a queer African-American man who contracted HIV, "but I've transcended it. This is what HIV positive looks like now. I'm going to die from something else before I die from that. My T-cell levels are twice yours because of this

medication. I go to the doctor now—as a Black, 51-year-old man, I go to the doctor every three months. That doesn't happen in my community. We don't trust doctors. But I go to the doctor, and I know what's going on in my body. I'm the healthiest I've been in my entire life. So it's time to let all that go and tell a different story. There's no more stigma—let's be done with that. It's time."

A different, and compelling, story is exactly what Porter shares with The Hollywood Reporter. The actor, who has won a Tony, an Emmy, a Grammy and several other awards, recounts the shame and trauma from his earlier decades: The Pentecostal church shamed him for being flamboyant and queer, and his stepfather sexually abused him from age 7 to 14.

"The worst year of my life," he says, was 2007, when he was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, filed bankruptcy papers and then on a fluke agreed to get an HIV test that was offered while visiting the Callen-Lorde clinic in New York City to have a pimple drained. The result was positive.



View this post on Instagram

A post shared by Billy Porter (@theebillyporter)

Ultimately, Porter's story is one of resilience, growth, acceptance, love and joy, a tale of an artist who was gifted the chances to work through many of his challenges via the roles he played—most recently as Pray Tell, an HIV-positive leader in the 1990s house and ball scene of New York City, in Ryan Murphy's TV series Pose, now in its third and final season.

Pose offered, Porter says, "an opportunity to work through the shame [of HIV] and where I have gotten to in this moment. And the brilliance of Pray Tell and this opportunity was that I was able to say everything that I wanted to say through a surrogate.

“I’m grateful to Pose and the spirit of it, the message of it, the purpose of it,” Porter says in the video accompanying the first-person article (you can watch the video at the top of this article). “My purpose, my calling, my ministry is about this conversation we’re having, because the world needs to know what HIV positive looks like.”



View this post on Instagram

A post shared by Billy Porter (@theebillyporter)

The world will definitely learn much more about Porter’s talents and life story, including his relationship with his mom and his husband, Adam Porter-Smith (subject of the Valentine’s Instagram post above).

What’s more, fans can look forward to numerous projects the actor has in the works. A film crew was present for the Hollywood Reporter scoop (likely for an upcoming Netflix documentary on his life), and Porter will star as the fairy godmother in an upcoming version of Cinderella; there’s also new music and even a memoir coming down the pipeline.

“My question was always, Why was I spared [from AIDS],” Porter says in the video. “Why am I living? I’m living so I can tell the story…so I can make sure everybody knows there was a whole generation who were here, and I stand on their shoulders. I can be who I am in this space and in this world because of the legacy they left for me. So it’s time to put my big boy pants on and talk.”

View this post on Instagram

A post shared by House of Xtravaganza (@houseofxtravaganza)

In related news, Porter has made headlines for his eye-catching and gender-defying fashion, such as the 2019 Oscars red-carpet look that channeled a ballroom legend. To read more about Pose and New York's ball scene, see "10s Across the Board!" and "Holding Court at the 28th Annual Latex Ball."

Pose remains one of the few TV shows on air to feature HIV plotlines. In fact, a GLAAD study from earlier this year finds a "drastic decrease" in HIV-positive characters. For more, read "Of the 773 Regular Characters on TV, Guess How many Have HIV."

If you want to read more stories of real people living and thriving with HIV, check out POZ Stories, where you'll find a collection of first-person tales—and where you can also include your own story.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/billy-porter-says-living-hiv-since-2007-video