2021 Top HIV News Stories

HIV disclosure, discrimination, COVID-19 and PrEP—did a single HIV news item dominate 2021 headlines?

December 22, 2021 By Trent Straube and Ian Anderson

Without a doubt, last year was all about COVID-19. Headlines about the coronavirus and its intersection with HIV dominated the 2020 Top HIV News Stories. Fast-forward 12 months, and we've witnessed the rollout of effective vaccines followed by the slow return to business as usual—well, until this past week (thanks, omicron). Reflecting this shift, COVID-19 no longer dominates our most-viewed HIV news stories of the year. Which topic has taken its place?

As you'll see in the Top 20 list below, COVID-19 does pop up, albeit more tangentially, such as in the No. 7 article, about TakeMeHome's free tests for HIV and sexually transmitted infections. In light of the many clinic closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, at-home tests and telehealth remained popular in 2021. The No. 9 article, from February, reported that people with HIV in Philadelphia were not approved to get COVID-19 vaccines according to city guidelines, which contradicted the state's advice. However, days after the news surfaced, the city updated its vaccine guidelines to include folks living with HIV.

Glancing through our other top HIV news stories of 2021, you'd be hard-pressed to declare one specific topic the most popular of the year, although a handful of subjects emerge multiple times. However, if you look at the top two articles and their similarities, you could argue that human interest stories garnered more eyeballs—more specifically, stories about disclosing one's HIV status and dealing with the related discrimination, struggles and pain.

You don't have to be a sports fan to relate to our top news story, about Los Angeles Dodgers manager Tommy Lasorda and the gay son he lost to AIDS in 1991. The tragic tale of their relationship resurfaced during coverage of the baseball legend's death in January 2021. Part of Lasorda's legacy is the fact that for many years, he denied that his son—Tommy Jr., aka Spunky—was gay and died of AIDS, only to later apologize. As journalist Karen Ocamb wrote, their story "exemplified the horrendous personal struggle gays and their families faced during the AIDS crisis."

Similarly, you don't have to follow celebrity red carpet fashions or love Broadway show tunes to appreciate the courage it took for Billy Porter to disclose to the world—via a fabulous video and a Hollywood Reporter cover story—that he has been living with HIV since 2007. Recounting sexual abuse, religious intolerance, shame and trauma, Porter delivered an inspiring story of surviving

and thriving. 2021 was definitely his year, with the season finale of Pose, an autobiography, an album, and a role as the fairy godmother in Cinderella among his accomplishments.

POZ readers like to be updated on the latest data and trends regarding the HIV epidemic. Several popular Newsfeed articles offered such information, including "Beware of Counterfeit Versions of These Two HIV Meds," about fake tablets of Biktarvy and Descovy being distributed at pharmacies; "A New National HIV Strategy Is Coming, What Might It Include?"; and "Which U.S. Region Sees the Highest Rates of HIV Diagnoses and Death?" (answer: the South).

Sidenote: POZ articles about science, research and HIV treatment are posted under Science News, while items about politics, pop culture, trends, human interest, community news, etc. are found under the more general Newsfeed. For a year-end roundup of the former, see "2021 Top HIV Science Stories."

Articles about lawsuits—discrimination cases, PrEP patent issues and, in one instance, felony charges against a "vampire facial" salon owner—appear on the 2021 Top News lists. As do another perennial favorite: the obituaries and remembrances of those who paved the way for us and continue to inspire, such as Timothy Ray Brown, the first man cured of HIV (he died of leukemia in 2020, but memorials were dedicated to him this year), and John L. Peterson, PhD, a Black same-gender-loving man who dedicated his work to HIV and health equity.

Finally, 2021 marked a milestone in the HIV epidemic. It was 40 years ago in June that the world first learned of HIV/AIDS, through a 1981 report in a publication of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Although not a top-viewed HIV news topic, that four-decade anniversary, much like these year-end lists, prompts us to contemplate how far we've come, where we are and what we have yet to accomplish.

Below are the POZ HIV News Stories that received the most page views in 2021.

1. The Tragedy of Baseball Icon Tommy Lasorda and His Gay Son Lost to AIDS
Posted: January 11

2. Billy Porter Says He's Been Living With HIV Since 2007 [VIDEO]
Posted: May 19

3. Can Blood Type Predict Your Chances of Developing Illnesses?
Posted: May 11

4. Cheaper Generic PrEP Now Available in the United States
Posted: May 21

5. Rapper DaBaby's HIV and Gay Comments Get Slammed for Spreading Ignorance
Posted: July 27

6. New Twist in the Gilead Patent Lawsuit Over Truvada and Descovy to Prevent HIV

Posted: January 7

7. Get Tested for HIV and STIs at Home, for Free
Posted: April 6

8. HIV Outbreak Reported in Minneapolis and Surrounding Area
Posted: May 26

9. Why a Man With AIDS Was Denied a COVID-19 Vaccine in Philadelphia
Posted: February 24

10. “Vampire Facial” Salon Owner Faces 24 Felony Charges After HIV Cases
Posted: April 23

11. Dear Governor Kemp: There Is No AIDS Vaccine
Posted: September 20

12. Scientists Discover Large Group of People Who Control HIV Without Meds
Posted: March 3

13. R.I.P. Dr. John L. Peterson: “Because Of Him, Black Gay Lives Matter”
Posted: June 14

14. Can These Three Gene Therapies Get Us Closer to an HIV Cure?
Posted: August 13

15. A New National HIV Strategy Is Coming. What Might It Include?
Posted: November 9

16. 11 HIV Community Groups Get a $3,000 “Hug”
Posted: January 6

17. $3M HIV Discrimination Lawsuit Filed Against Morehouse College
Posted: March 23

18. Which U.S. Region Sees the Highest Rates of HIV Diagnoses and Deaths?
Posted: August 25

19. First Person Cured of HIV, Who Died Last Year, Is Memorialized [VIDEO]
Posted: May 12

20. Beware of Counterfeit Versions of These Two HIV Meds
Posted: August 10

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