



“Empire” Plot Adds HIV, PrEP and Two Black Men in Love

But how will Cookie deal with her son’s HIV-positive lover?

November 2, 2018 By [Trent Straube](#)

Actor Jussie Smollett of the hit TV series *Empire* has been pushing for an HIV-centric plotline for some time. This season, the topic of HIV finally gets the star treatment. Smollett’s character, the openly gay Jamal—son of less-than-accepting hip-hop mogul Lucious Lyon (Terrence Howard)—is falling in love with Kai (Toby Onwumere), a journalist living with HIV. Drama ensues.

.[@EmpireFOX](#) takes on HIV. For star [@JussieSmollett](#), a longtime activist, it’s personal, “I’m still losing people to AIDS.” Last night’s episode includes information about [#PrEP](#)—the pill to prevent HIV—and treatment as prevention. [#KnowledgelsPower](#)
<https://t.co/nGCz7hTdQW>
— Greater Than AIDS (@GreaterThanAIDS) [November 1, 2018](#)

[Smollett tells The New York Times](#) that he hopes to “normalize” the reality of what it’s like to live with and deal with HIV today. To ensure they got the details right, he said, the *Empire* team worked with people living with HIV, including Phill Wilson, the founder of the Black AIDS Institute and a longtime mentor to Smollett.

In fact, Smollett has been advocating for HIV awareness for years. Just one example: He appears in

a public service announcement for the Black AIDS Institute and AIDS Healthcare, saying: “Cut the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS, for those infected and affected. For more information, please go to BlackAIDS.org and AIDSHealth.org.” (Watch it at the bottom of this article.)

Take your judgemental self home, Candace! [#Empire](#)

pic.twitter.com/Fttxl2mzfu

— Empire (@EmpireFOX) [November 1, 2018](#)

The New York Times article surveys HIV’s appearances on TV since the 1980s, when it was more prominent in story lines and news headlines. Empire, though, offers a relevant platform at a time when the issue has fallen out of vogue. The series follows an African-American family running an entertainment empire, and today, the Black community remains at higher risk for HIV than most population groups.

What’s more, the story line introduces viewers to pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), the daily pill that HIV-negative people—including women—can take to prevent contracting the virus. The show’s popularity on social media offers another opportunity to raise awareness.

Smollett says he’s most pleased to see a plot revolving around “two Black men who are in love.” He tells the Times: “I haven’t been this excited about Jamal’s story line since season 1.”

HIV/AIDS does not discriminate – it affects ALL of us.

Special thank you to [@EmpireFOX](#) for addressing such an important issue in last night’s episode. |

[#KnowYourStatushttps://t.co/ICu8LL8gBp](https://t.co/ICu8LL8gBp)

pic.twitter.com/2RF1lzdKud

— AIDS Healthcare (@AIDSHealthcare) [November 1, 2018](#)

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

<http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/empire-plot-adds-hiv-prep-two-black-men-love>