



Positive Again

In a blog post titled “[COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter on HIV Long-Term Survivors Awareness Day](#),” POZ editor-in-chief Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr. shares his experiences testing antibody positive for COVID-19. Below is an edited excerpt.

August 17, 2020 By [Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.](#)

I had long resisted the identity of long-term survivor. I tested HIV positive in 1992 at age 22, four years before effective treatment. Regardless, for most of my time living with HIV, I just didn't think I had earned the honor of being considered a long-term survivor.

After 25 years of living with HIV, I finally felt comfortable identifying as a long-term survivor. I feel that identity applies to me even more now that I'll soon be turning 50 years old. In August, I will finally become a member of the 50-plus club, and I'm thrilled.

In 1992, aging with HIV was a privilege I never thought would become a reality for me. I completely expected to die before I saw 30. I behaved that way too. Ever since I turned 30, I've been adjusting to the fact that I'm still alive and probably will be for a long while.

So I was jolted a bit when I recently tested antibody positive for COVID-19. I had what I thought was a mild flu in February, but when reports emerged that the new coronavirus had been circulating in the New York area earlier than thought, I became suspicious.

I doubted my initial HIV-positive test result, so I got tested again soon after to confirm. The same was true of my COVID-19 result. I had it confirmed with a second test from a different lab. Both labs are reputable, so I have decided to accept the result as true.

I doubted my preliminary HIV test result mostly because I didn't want to accept the possibility of an early death. In the case of COVID-19, my initial doubt was based on my partner's antibody-negative result and the chance of a false positive.

I know folks are going to ask, so I'll just say it. My partner and I have an agreement that if one of us is sick we stay away from each other. I slept on the couch for a week when I was sick, so perhaps it was enough to keep us apart when I was most infectious.

I can't deny that I have a sense of relief. I most likely had the new coronavirus, and it didn't kill me. There is comfort in that thought. However, in addition to my decision to accept the result as true, I have also decided not to change my COVID-19 pandemic prevention behaviors.

I have no idea whether my antibodies provide immunity from reinfection. Even if they do, I have no idea how long that may last and no idea whether being reinfected would be milder or worse for me. Say my immunity only lasts for a few months. That means I would already be susceptible again.

I do not want to contribute to the spread of the new coronavirus if I can help it. And I can. I will continue to abide by physical distancing, wearing a mask when appropriate, washing my hands frequently and avoiding touching my face to the best of my ability.

I am grateful to be able to commemorate HIV Long-Term Survivors Awareness Day, marked every year on June 5, as a long-term survivor.

Living with the retrovirus and now surviving the new coronavirus have only reinvigorated my commitment to uplifting others.

That includes people living with HIV and those who have had COVID-19 as well as those affected by stigma, discrimination and violence.

That also includes people of color, of course, but we must say explicitly that it includes Black people. Black Lives Matter. Period.

HIV wasn't a club I wanted to join, but I've met some of the most wonderful people as a result, so I can't say it hasn't been meaningful. I hope my journey ahead as a member of the unwanted COVID-19 club turns out to be just as consequential.

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