Strike a Pose and Prevent HIV in This Ballroom Dance Class

Voguer and “Pose” actor Jason Rodriguez joins Gilead’s House of Healthysexual to teach dance, PrEP, HIV history and more.

April 2, 2024 By Trent Straube

In a dance pairing that earns 10s across the board, voguer Jason Rodriguez joins House of Healthysexual to offer a ballroom dance class that also teaches HIV prevention.

To be held Friday evening, April 12, in Manhattan, the dance class is open to about 100 people and will teach participants not only how to vogue but also how to prioritize their sexual health, notably through pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), the HIV prevention tool available as daily pills and long-acting injectables. The class is sponsored by Gilead Sciences, the pharma giant that manufactures numerous blockbuster HIV meds, including Truvada for PrEP.

Rodriguez makes for an ideal instructor. A trained dancer with a history in New York City’s ballroom scene, Rodriguez played Lemar Khan on the FX series Pose, which followed numerous Black and Latino LGBTQ characters as they navigated house and ballroom culture and the AIDS epidemic in ’80s and ’90s New York.

Voguer and “Pose” actor Jason RodriguezCourtesy of John Carlo

The dance class will incorporate this rich history, as Rodriguez and other dancers will share stories and information about maintaining sexual health (such as where to get tested for HIV).

To sign up for the class, visit houseofhealthysexual.rsvpify.com.

Healthysexual is a Gilead campaign to educate about sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV testing and prevention. For related stories, see "Want to Hear Healthy Sexual Stories? [VIDEOS]" and "In a First, Drugmaker Gilead Promotes PrEP and HIV Prevention in TV Ads."

In writing about Pose when it debuted in 2018, POZ wrote:

> The category is: Best Presentation of HIV Realness in a Television Series or Show. Darlings, if you've seen even one episode of FX's hit Pose, then you know who's taking home this trophy. Set in the house and ball scene of 1980s New York City, the eight-episode story follows predominantly Black and Latinx LGBT outcasts struggling to survive the streets and the AIDS epidemic. They build community by living together in "houses" that function as families, complete with mothers; different houses compete against one another in balls that feature voguing and runway categories.
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> The show, coproduced by Ryan Murphy, made history for featuring "the largest cast of transgender actors in series regular roles as well as the largest recurring cast of LGBTQ actors ever for a scripted series," according to FX. Often overshadowed is this noteworthy aspect: The show highlights the devastation of HIV/AIDS in these communities. Two of the lead characters are HIV positive at the close of season 1, which ends in 1988, eight years before the advent of effective HIV treatment.

The series also starred MJ Rodriguez and Billy Porter. In a 2021 Hollywood Reporter cover story, Porter, who previously starred in Broadway's Kinky Boots, disclosed his HIV status. To read more, see "Billy Porter Says He's Been Living With HIV Since 2007 [VIDEO]."

And see the POZ Basics on Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) to learn more about how it prevents HIV. It reads in part:

> Antiretroviral drugs not only help people living with HIV maintain good health and reduce transmission, but they also enable HIV-negative people to avoid contracting the virus. Pre-exposure prophylaxis—better known as PrEP—refers to pills or injections taken regularly to prevent HIV.
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> PrEP Options
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> There are currently three antiretroviral options approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for HIV prevention:
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> Truvada (tenofovir disoproxil fumarate/emtricitabine, or TDF/FTC);
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> Descovy (tenofovir alafenamide/emtricitabine, or TAF/FTC);

Apretude (long-acting cabotegravir).

Click here for the POZ HIV Prevention Drug Chart for more information about each of the available options.

Truvada (also available as generic TDF/FTC) was approved for HIV prevention in 2012. It is approved for all populations at increased risk for HIV. It is usually taken once daily, but studies show that taking it "on demand" before and after sex—known as PrEP 2-1-1—also works well. Studies of cisgender gay and bisexual men and transgender women, including the pivotal iPrEX trial, have shown that daily Truvada is around 99% effective for preventing HIV if used consistently as directed. Truvada PrEP is also effective for cisgender women, but they may need to maintain better adherence for optimal protection.

Truvada is generally safe and well tolerated, though it can cause minor side effects, such as nausea, which usually resolve after the first few weeks or months. The TDF component can cause kidney problems and bone loss in susceptible individuals, and it is not recommended for people with preexisting kidney impairment. The drugs in Truvada are also active against hepatitis B virus (HBV), and liver flare-ups can occur if people with HIV/HBV coinfection stop taking it.

Descovy (not yet available as generic TAF/FTC) was approved for PrEP in 2019. It is approved for cisgender men and transgender women. However, due to a lack of evidence, it is not yet indicated for people exposed to HIV via vaginal sex, such as cisgender women and trans men. Descovy should be taken once daily, not on demand before and after sex. The DISCOVER trial showed that daily Descovy PrEP is as effective as daily Truvada for cisgender men and trans women. Studies of cisgender women are currently underway.

Descovy is generally safe and well tolerated, though it, too, can cause minor side effects. Compared with the TDF in Truvada, TAF is easier on the kidneys and bones, but it has been linked to elevated blood fat levels and possible weight gain. The drugs in Descovy are also active against HBV. (Click here to learn more about the differences between TDF and TAF.)

Apretude was approved for HIV prevention in 2021. It is approved for all populations at increased risk for HIV. It is given as an injection, usually in the butt, administered by a health provider for two consecutive months and then every other month. The HPTN 083 trial showed that Apretude is even more effective than daily Truvada for cisgender men who have sex with men and transgender women. The HPTN 084 trial found that Apretude was substantially more effective for cisgender women in Africa, largely thanks to better adherence.

Apretude is generally safe and well tolerated, with no major adverse effects. The most common side effect is mild to moderate pain, redness or swelling at the injection site, which usually goes away after a few days. Of note, HIV diagnosis may be delayed in the rare cases when infection occurs despite using Apretude.

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