Kanye West Telling Friends Pete Davidson Has AIDS?

So the hot rumor is that Kanye West is telling his friends that Pete Davidson has AIDS, as a means to insult the comedian. It's typical BS.

January 28, 2022 By Shawn Decker

I was all set to chill out and play some video games, and then a gossip site ran a story suggesting that Kanye West is telling people that Pete Davidson has AIDS. I know, that's a lot to take in. Just focus on the someone using AIDS as an attempt at slander.

I'll preface this by saying: I don't know what Kanye West tells his friends. What I do know? People in all walks of life are, and have, used a medical condition as a way to cast someone in a negative light. The stigma that already exists is what allows the weaponization of a medical condition, and whether the suggestion is true or not matters little when the subject's image has been damaged either way. In some way we've all been the victim of some form of this, or we have contributed to that stigma by simply laughing awkwardly at something instead of challenging a bias.

For those who don't follow pop culture, musician Kanye West was married to entrepreneur Kim Kardashian who is now dating funnyman Pete Davidson. Davidson is a slender fellow with a gaunt face. I only describe his features to explain why Kanye would say such a thing. Not that he did. It's what someone would say if they were saying that Davidson looks sick. So if someone were wanting to talk shit on someone with a thinner frame about 'em, they wouldn't pull "dude has cancer" out of their ass, would they? Where stigma is concerned, HIV and AIDS are still the kings with herpes challenging for the throne with each late night show's writing staff's cheap shots at people who are living with STDs. (Nervous audience laughter does not a successful joke make.)

Anywho. Stigma sucks. Rumors suck. Humans? We are just the worst. The best we can do is try to be better. As a longterm survivor with HIV, seeing a story like this come back around is just like seeing some terrible fashion come back around: "... JAMS? REALLY?" That's what the "dude has AIDS" story feels like for me.

I can still remember how I felt starting 7th Grade, being HIV positive in a small town with a lot of whispering going on about my status. There'd been a kerfuffle in the 6th Grade, when I tested positive, and I was kicked out of school with about two weeks left in the school year. My mom waged a private battle with school officials to get me back in, and when she was successful the last thing I wanted to do was tip my hand that I had HIV- seems it had caused enough trouble as

is.

The first day of 7th grade, a flyer was passed out to every student in home room, informing students that one of their classmates was HIV positive. By lunch, it was the talk of the hallways. As I waited in line holding my plastic tray, I heard a couple of guys in front of me pointing to another student up ahead of us in the line. “I bet he’s the one with AIDS,” one of them said. They’d singled out a skinny guy. “Oh, yeah… uh huh.” I said, agreeing, somewhat gleefully because it meant that maybe I’d be able to retain some privacy where my new medical condition was concerned.

It was junior high school- I wasn’t allowed to be in PE class, so for me to make it out in one piece I had to view it all as “survival of the wittest”. Through a good portion of that year, I was dealing with depression and ended up staying home to watch soap operas and eat Little Debbie cakes. That first half of 7th Grade is where I developed the little love handles that probably helped keep me safe from the AIDSWatching that was taking place at school. In 1987, the only images of people with HIV/AIDS were usually set in a hospital environment, with the person being at the end of their life…

Kanye West is two years younger than me. He went through puberty under the shadow of HIV/AIDS, just like the rest of Generation X. Kanye was probably a freshman in high school when Magic Johnson announced that he’d tested positive for HIV. If he is telling people that Pete has AIDS, he’s using the old school playbook from some of the darkest, early days of the pandemic.

In a interesting side note, I’ve been going through some old VHS tapes, digitizing them for future deletion. I came across a speech I made in December of 1999. I was 24 years old. I’d just started on HIV meds after letting my viral load get way out of control. Still, after only a few months of treatment my viral load was going down and my own gaunt face was starting to get some more flesh. At the time, I hadn’t done too much public speaking. My weak voice also reminded me of where I was at in regaining my health. A couple of long minutes into my wayward speech, I was talking about my decision to open up about my status at age 20. I said I wanted to fight stigma. “And, kind of like one of my heroes, Muhammad Ali, I wanted to tell people: ’Who knew AIDS could be so pretty?’”

I chuckled at half-my-age me’s wit. But also recognized that, perhaps, I may have been leaning into the stigma of what the public’s perception of people with HIV/AIDS was, too. Because, as Ali would prove when he was older and wiser: beauty is what is on the inside and the kindness of spirit that connects us.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.