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Charlie Sheen says he's HIV-positive, has been extorted for \$10 million over diagnosis

By Emily Yahr | November 17, 2015

Charlie Sheen confirmed on Tuesday that he is HIV-positive, as rumored in recent days by an onslaught of tabloid stories. Sheen [told Matt Lauer on the "Today" show](#) that he is going public with his illness for multiple reasons, including that he's been blackmailed for upwards of \$10 million since he was diagnosed four years ago.

Sheen said that he hired prostitutes over the years, some of whom turned around and extorted him over his diagnosis. Sheen told Lauer that one woman took a cellphone photo of the antiretroviral HIV medication he had in his bathroom and threatened to sell the image to the tabloids.

"What people forget is that's money they're taking from my children," Sheen told Lauer. "They think it's just me, but I've got five kids and a granddaughter. ... I release myself from this prison today."

Sheen said depression over his condition led him to drug and alcohol use, "making a lot of bad decisions" that resulted in hiring more prostitutes who could blackmail him.

"That part I own, one hundred percent," Sheen said.



In an interview Tuesday on NBC’s “Today,” the actor said he has HIV.

He told Lauer he led with “condoms and honesty” with all of his sexual partners, and it “couldn’t be farther from the truth” that he threatened the health of many others — he said it’s impossible that he transmitted the disease to anyone else. Sheen said that he had unprotected sex with two partners, but both were warned ahead of time and under a doctor’s care. Sheen confirmed that before sexual activity, he’s told all of his partners that he is HIV-positive.

Sheen also doesn’t know how he contracted the virus, but told Lauer that it had nothing to do with needles.

Rumors about the actor’s health recently emerged in the tabloid press in places like Radar Online: NBC announced his appearance on the “Today” show on Monday right after [the National Enquirer revealed a new cover story](#) that said Sheen is HIV-positive and was being blackmailed. The tabloid said its story is running after a “dogged 18-month investigation.”

Later on “Today,” Sheen’s doctor **Robert Huizenga** sat down to confirm that the actor contracted HIV, but after anti-viral treatment, he has an “undetectable” level of the virus in his blood. Contrary to what some tabloid outlets speculated, Sheen does not have AIDS.



“[The treatment] suppressed the virus to the point that he’s absolutely healthy from that vantage,” Huizenga said. “And my biggest concern with Charlie as a patient is substance abuse and depression from the disease more than what the HIV virus can do in terms of shortening his life — because it’s not going to.” (Sheen said he still drinks, but has stopped using drugs.)

Lauer also fact-checked Sheen’s claim that it would be impossible to transmit the disease to someone else through protected sex.

“Individuals who are optimally treated, who have undetected viral loads and who responsibly use protection have incredibly low — it’s incredibly rare to transmit the virus,” the doctor said. “We can’t say that that’s zero, but it’s a very, very low number.”

Sheen, who once made nearly \$2 million per episode as the star of CBS’s hit “Two and a Half Men,” is known for his troubled personal life, with a [much-documented](#) history of substance abuse and prostitutes. His most stunning meltdown occurred in early 2011, just after he was arrested for domestic violence against his then-wife, Brooke Mueller. This followed reports of drugs, Vegas partying, and [a lawsuit from a porn star](#) who was reportedly found locked in Sheen’s hotel room.

CBS [shut down production](#) on “Two and a Half Men” so Sheen could go to rehab. When he started calling into radio shows to bash the show’s creator, Chuck Lorre, as well as the network, CBS fired Sheen and scrapped the rest of the season. This led to Sheen going rogue, giving interviews with his two live-in “goddesses” (one a former porn star) and launching his own cross-country tour. Because Hollywood loves second chances, Sheen still landed another sitcom, “Anger Management” on FX, which wrapped in 2014.

Lauer asked Sheen if this behavior was because of his reaction to the HIV-positive diagnosis.

“I wish I could blame it on that,” Sheen said. “That was more of a ‘roid rage. But this was — this was — on the heels of that, let me say, yeah.”



Jon Cryer and Charlie Sheen on “Two and a Half Men.” (Greg Gayne/Warner Bros.)

In terms of legal repercussions now, Sheen acknowledged he’s expecting to face a “barrage of lawsuits” given how sexually active he’s been over the last four years. Lauer noted that 35 states have laws that say people infected with HIV must disclose that fact to their sexual partners, or they can be charged with a crime.

“This I completely understand, and I completely respect that. But having divulged it is the reason I’m in the mess that I’m in with having all the — all the shakedowns, you know,” Sheen replied. “I can’t sit here and protect against all of that or completely worry about it. I can only sit here with you and tell my truth.”

The actor said the worst part about reading the rumors in the last few days were those he said he was “intentionally” spreading HIV. “I just thought, wow...damn, that’s far from the truth as anything could be,” Sheen said.

Sheen, once the highest paid actor on television, admitted that the extortion made a dent in his savings, calling his current finances “not great.” He said that people in the industry already know about his illness and he has a couple prospects for a new TV show



and a couple movies — though his situation right now is “not commerce driven, it’s socially driven.”

Sheen was eventually replaced on “Two and a Half Men” by Ashton Kutcher, and most of the show’s series finale was spent [making not-so-subtle digs at Sheen](#). (After someone noted that Sheen’s character died under mysterious circumstances, one character replied, “It wasn’t that mysterious. He was taking a lot of drugs and pissed off almost everybody.”) Co-star Jon Cryer shared many Sheen stories in his memoir, and said Sheen essentially became his personal prostitution guru [after Cryer got divorced](#).

However, Sheen has been mostly out of the spotlight as of late, save for [astartling Twitter screed](#) against Denise Richards over the summer. The two actors, who had a [highly publicized custody fight](#) over their young daughters, were married from 2002 to 2006. Sheen and Mueller wed in 2008, but divorced in 2011 after they had twin sons. He has another 30-year-old daughter and a 2-year-old granddaughter.

Sheen was engaged to former adult film star Brett Rossi last year, but [the couple split](#) right before their wedding in November. He was also previously married to model Donna Peele for about a year in 1995.

“The stigma that is attached to this diagnosis is one of the worst parts about it. People don’t take action, they don’t get help because of that stigma. Do you still feel that stigma?” Lauer asked.

“Not anymore I don’t,” Sheen said. “I have a responsibility now to better myself and to help a lot of other people. And hopefully with what we’re doing today, others may come forward and say ‘Thanks, Charlie. Thanks for kicking the door open.’”

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2015/11/17/charlie-sheen-i-am-in-fact-hiv-positive/>