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Charlie Sheen's HIV Confession "Sparked Interest in Disease"

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In November 2015, the U.S. actor confessed that he had been diagnosed HIV-positive four years earlier and had chosen to speak publicly on the subject after being blackmailed by unidentified people.

"While no one should be forced to disclose their HIV status and all diagnostics are tragic... Sheen can benefit public health, potentially helping people learn more about HIV and prevention," public health professor John W. Ayers wrote.

According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), it is estimated that more than 1.2 million people in the U.S. live with HIV, of which around 13 percent are unaware of their infection.

Sheen shared the link to the SDSU research through his Twitter account, which has more than 11 million followers.

"Honored, humbled, inspired, hopeful," he wrote.

The study, which was published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), shows that Sheen's disclosure on NBC's "Today" show corresponded with the greatest number of HIV-related Google searches ever recorded in the U.S.

The boost comes amid a "historical decline" in information on HIV prevention and awareness, according to the study.

In the past two years, the number of media reports on HIV dropped from 67 per 1,000 in 2014, to 12 per 1,000 in 2015. In contrast, on the day of Sheen's confession, media stories surged by 265 percent. More than 6,500 of them appeared on Google News alone.

