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ASIA EDITION

Rapid At-Home COVID-19 Testing Becoming Available in Some Areas

October 4, 2021 | Opinion | By Devin Partida is a medical and health tech writer from San Francisco, California. She also writes about medical technologies, AI and cybersecurity on ReHack.com.

Earlier in the year, the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) went ahead and purchased 2 million at-home test kits, intending to provide them to Ohioans at no charge. Individuals who are concerned about catching the virus can now access free at-home testing kits from their local library.



There's no denying that there's been a substantial increase in the number of COVID-19 cases around the country. In August, libraries across Ohio teamed up with the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) to provide access to free testing in an effort to limit the spread and combat the delta variant.

The Abbott BinaxNOW Home Test is to be completed at home and comes with a provided telehealth session to oversee test administration and report results.

Ohioans can receive this free test for any reason — whether they're vaccinated or not, if they believe they've been exposed to someone with COVID-19, or if they have symptoms. These test kits allowed more Ohioans to receive testing than ever before during the pandemic.

So far, this method seems to be successful. A reported 246 library locations were able to distribute more than 53,000 test kits statewide. However, the recent move by the ODH raises many questions: What other states will offer free testing kits? Will this work to prevent the spread of the delta variant? How effective are these test kits?

Below is some more general information about at-home coronavirus test kits, which states offer free testing kits, and how effective they are at detecting the infection.

The Viability of At-Home Testing Kits

At-home COVID-19 testing kits serve as a feasible solution for those who otherwise lack access to a test site or would like to get tested from the comfort of their own home. There's been some debate over the efficacy of the tests, so here is a breakdown of the types of FDA-approved at-home rapid tests available and their general effectiveness.

There are currently two types of tests one can perform at home to determine whether they test positive or negative for the coronavirus:

- **Home collection tests**: The individual collects a sample, typically with a nose or saliva swab, and sends the sample to a laboratory. Results come back in a few days.
- **At-home testing**: The individual collects a sample and tests it at home. The results are available in a few minutes.

It's crucial to distinguish between the two types of tests, though; at-home testing can sometimes lead to false results, as the test isn't as sensitive as home collection tests. Home collection tests are typically more effective at detecting the presence of the virus because medical professionals in a lab setting carefully analyze the results.

It's suggested that if someone is experiencing a severe case of symptoms or was in a high-exposure area, it's worthwhile for them to have a formal test completed by a health care facility.

Which States Offer Free At-Home Test Kits?

Other states like Michigan, Wisconsin, Delaware, New Jersey, and California are examples of states offering free at-home rapid testing kits to their residents. In addition, federal agents are also running a program in counties in North Carolina and Tennessee to learn more about the spread of the virus.

So the answer to this question is a bit unclear. Many states offer free testing at specified locations, but it seems as though some states have yet to provide at-home rapid testing kits to their residents.

Many states, however, are encouraging their residents to get vaccinated as soon as it's available to them. One important statistic worth noting is that 99.5% of the people dying from COVID-19 are unvaccinated. According to the CDC, vaccines effectively protect individuals from a severe case of the deadly disease, which is why many state officials are urging residents to become vaccinated.

As for at-home testing, more states may offer free at-home testing for convenience and to hopefully stop the spread of the surging delta variant. As more technologies emerge that could potentially combat the virus, it'll be interesting to see how long this pandemic will last.

An Uncertain Future Regarding the COVID-19 Pandemic

While researchers at McKinsey were hopeful to see the pandemic come to an end in 2021, based on vaccination rates and the surges being felt across the country, it's still uncertain whether that will happen or not.

If more states are willing to implement the latest technology, encourage their residents to get vaccinated, and offer at-home testing options, the pandemic may end sooner rather than later. If not, the goal is to achieve herd immunity and hope the pandemic ends next year.