Are Home Tests the Wave of the Future?

In the midst of the pandemic, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) tried a similar approach for HIV testing—and it appears to have been a success.

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During the COVID-19 era, many Americans got used to swabbing their own noses to test for the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus. In the midst of the pandemic, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) tried a similar approach for HIV testing—and it appears to have been a success.

One in four of the 100,000 free OraQuick home oral HIV tests the CDC sent out went to people who had never been tested for HIV before, CDC epidemiologist Pollyanna Chávez, PhD, reported at the Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections. Another third went to people who hadn't been tested in the last year.

When the researchers broke down the results by demographics, they found that some groups with high rates of HIV were especially well served by the approach. For instance, 81% of the 17-year-olds and 46% of people ages 18 to 24 who requested tests had never been tested before.

What's more, Black and Latino gay and bisexual men, who account for a majority of new HIV diagnoses, made up more than half of those ordering home tests: 32% were Latino, of whom 19% had never tested before, and 16% were Black, of whom 20% hadn't tested before. A quarter of all home tests went to cisgender women, 43% of whom were Black. Transgender and genderqueer people accounted for nearly 5% of those ordering tests.

Home testing may be the wave of the future for other conditions as well. A George Washington University program that sent home tests for the cancer-causing human papillomavirus (HPV) to cisgender women living with HIV in Washington, DC, found that the tests detected the virus in 25 of 40 women who used the tests.

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