

NEWS

HIV self-tests to be sold in pharmacies

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The self-tests will be available over the counter from mid-December in a move that has been welcomed by sexual health clinicians.



The self-tests will initially be sold in Sydney and Western Australia, before becoming more widely available in other states in 2022.

For the first time in Australia, anybody concerned they have HIV will be able to buy a self-test in pharmacies from mid-December.

The self-tests, which cost \$25, will initially be sold at Serafim's pharmacy at Taylor Square in Sydney and the Pharmacy 777 in Western Australia, before becoming more widely available in other states in 2022.

It is an initiative that is strongly supported by Dr Amy Moten, Chair of RACGP Specific Interests Sexual Health.

'This change, which is perfectly timed to coincide with the World AIDS Day, means that people will be able to go into a pharmacy, buy a test on the spot, take it home and get tested if that's what they want to do,' Dr Moten told *newsGP*.

'And we're really looking forward to more pharmacies being able to provide the service.'

Describing the test as 'a really important tool', Dr Moten said it would increase the chances of the disease being identified early.

'We know that in order to reduce transmission, but also to reduce morbidity from HIV, the earlier someone is diagnosed, the sooner they can start treatment, which increases their life expectancy.'

'It also reduces the risk of them transmitting HIV to someone else.'

‘And if people are doing this test who wouldn’t have normally done regular serology testing with their GP, they are more likely to be diagnosed and treated earlier.’

Only one HIV self-test, the ATOMO HIV self-test, has been approved so far by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) in Australia.

The diagnosis tool, which uses a finger prick test, had previously only been available online – a situation Dr Moten said could limit access.

‘There are some problems with that, including the fact that they have to wait for the test to be posted to them,’ she said.

‘And they have to choose an address [where it] is safe for them to receive the test ... which could vary depending on whether they live alone or with other people.’

On its website, [the TGA says](#) a condition limiting the supply of the test was withdrawn on 22 October this year in order to improve access.

A study published in [Lancet HIV in 2017](#) suggested that self-tests caused testing levels to improve significantly.

‘Self-testing resulted in a two times increase in frequency of testing in gay and bisexual men at high risk of infection, and a nearly four times increase in non-recent testers, compared with standard care, without reducing the frequency of facility-based HIV testing,’ the study reads.

Dr Moten also believes the likelihood of a positive test in the home causing distress is relatively slim, and that general practice will still have a key role to play.

‘People have a realistic view of HIV these days, we know that with early testing and treatment the life expectancy of someone living with HIV can be the same as someone who has not got HIV,’ she said.

‘We know that they’ll be able to come back to us if they do have a reactive result and get all of the healthcare that they need at that point in time.’

The launch of the HIV self-tests has also been welcomed by Darryl O’Donnell, the CEO of the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO).

‘While stigma and discrimination are easing, they still present barriers for many people knowing their status,’ he said. ‘Being able to perform a finger prick test in the comfort of your own home will encourage more people to test for HIV.’

Data released by the [Kirby Institute on World AIDS Day](#) recorded 633 new diagnoses in Australia in 2020, a 30% fall compared to the previous year. While described as ‘encouraging’, the decline is likely to have been skewed by COVID-19 according to Dr Skye McGregor, an epidemiologist and head of the Surveillance Innovation Group at the Kirby Institute.

‘While we expected HIV diagnoses to continue on a downward trajectory, a decline of this magnitude has almost certainly been influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic,’ Dr McGregor said.

‘With COVID-19 social restrictions in place, people have been having less sex, and were less likely to go and get tested. There has also been less travel in and out of Australia.’

‘Nevertheless, these low numbers are good news and should be celebrated.’

The Federal Government also timed new [funding announcements for World AIDS Day](#), including \$39 million to provide HIV treatment for people ineligible for Medicare, and \$11m for HIV organisations.

Earlier this year, the Agenda 2025 document was published, which is backed by HIV clinicians, the AFAO, the Kirby Institute and the Doherty Institute. It [outlines how a goal of zero HIV transmission](#) could become a reality in Australia within the next four years.

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- Yes 61%
- No 17%
- Not personally, but my colleagues have 5%
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