TuSalud

A Sure Thing for Grindr Users: Free Home HIV Tests!

The CDC's Together TakeMeHome program aims to deliver 1 million free HIV self-tests through a new website—and the Grindr app.

March 24, 2023 By Trent Straube

If you're on the wildly popular gay dating app Grindr, you now have a sure bet: Click the "Free HIV Home Test" button, and a nice little package will arrive at your front door. Or back door if you prefer.

Grindr joined a national effort launched this week to deliver 1 million free HIV self-tests during the next five years; the HIV tests are also available online to folks not on the app. Titled Together TakeMeHome, the program is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

launching today: free HIV home test kits to all Grindr users in the US* ❤ we're proud to partner with @BHOCPartners and @cdc_HIV in this huge step toward increasing access to testing in the fight against the HIV epidemic ???? #StopHIVTogether pic.twitter.com/A4cNbkTVBV

— Grindr (@Grindr) March 21, 2023

In a Dear Colleague letter March 21, the CDC's Division of HIV Prevention described the national HIV testing effort:

> "We are pleased to announce the launch of Together TakeMeHome (TTMH), a project with the goal of distributing up to 1 million free HIV self-tests over the next five years. People in the

> United States, including Puerto Rico, can order up to two free HIV self-tests every 90 days via a new online portal. Tests are available to anyone 17 years or older, regardless of health insurance or immigration status. TTMH is supported by CDC, in partnership with Emory University, Building Healthy Online Communities (BHOC), NASTAD, Signal Group, and OraSure Technologies."

As we reported last September, the CDC awarded $8.3 million per year to Together TakeMeHome for its five-year project (for a total of $41.5 million). For those not on Grindr, orders placed on the program's website, Together.TakeMeHome.org, are processed by Amazon, which delivers the OraSure tests in discreet packages. The site is available in both English and Spanish.

WOOHOO! Together TakeMeHome launches TODAY expanding free HIV self-testing to anyone 17 & older throughout the U.S., including Puerto Rico. @TMHtesting continues to offer an expanded set of self-testing services, including STI testing & PrEP labs.

????https://t.co/eskMwzZxzx

pic.twitter.com/KoJHUVN6SZ

— Building Healthy Online Communities (@BHOCPartners) March 21, 2023

The Dear Colleague letter, signed by Robyn Neblett Fanfair, MD, MPH, captain of the U.S. Public Health Service and acting division director of the Division of HIV Prevention, explains both the need and the research behind TTMH:

> "HIV testing is a critical HIV prevention strategy and a key first step in the continuum of HIV care, yet too many people are unaware of their HIV status. By offering free HIV self-tests through mail delivery, TTMH addresses common barriers to HIV testing, such as stigma, privacy concerns, cost, and lack of access to HIV clinics, giving people who otherwise might not have tested an opportunity to know their status. Priority audiences for the program and the Let's Stop HIV Together (Together) campaign outreach include populations with

> disproportionately high HIV incidence, including gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men, particularly Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino gay and bisexual men, Black/African American cisgender women, and transgender women of all races and ethnicities. TTMH will be the largest HIV self-testing program in United States history and will bolster prevention and treatment efforts across the nation. Furthermore, TTMH will promote equity by expanding testing options for people facing social and structural barriers to accessing traditional testing venues.
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> "This project is based on research that showed this type of HIV self-testing is effective and cost-saving. Multiple studies have demonstrated the value of self-testing for increasing the frequency of HIV testing, identifying new diagnoses, and reaching people who reported that they have never previously tested for HIV. The new TTMH program expands on a prior program where CDC, Emory, BHOC, and other partners distributed 100,000 free HIV self-tests in eight months. The outreach was conducted as part of CDC's Together campaign and effectively reached priority populations, 26% of whom reported never having tested for HIV. As a result of this success, CDC expanded the model to work toward achieving the Ending the HIV Epidemic in the U.S. (EHE) initiative's goal of reducing new infections by 90% by 2030."

In 2019, out of 34,800 total new HIV diagnoses in the United States, 24,500 (70%) were among men who have sex with men, according to the CDC. So it makes sense to make HIV tests available through apps like Grindr that are popular among gay, bisexual and transgender people.

"If you've got a way that you are testing, and it's really working for you, then that's great, and you should stick with that," Jack Harrison-Quintana, director of Grindr for Equality, the app's social justice division, told NBC News. "If you don't, this is an additional way for you to get tested in a way that's just about as easy as doing an at-home COVID test." In a Grindr blog post, he added that the company won't collect data during the process.

In the United States, about 1.2 million people are living with HIV. According to the POZ Basics on HIV Testing, the CDC estimates that around 14% of people with HIV do not know they carry the virus, and nearly 40% of new HIV infections are transmitted by people who don't know their status.

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