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## Flu test at-home

Key takeaways:There are at-home flu tests that give you results in as little as 15 minutes.You can buy these tests online without a prescription. You can use your health savings account (HSA) or flexible spending account (FSA) account to help cover the cost.There's treatment available for the flu, and it's best to start it within 48 hours of your symptoms starting. info. outlinedPromotional disclosureCourtesy of LabcorpA lot of different viruses can cause fever, cough, and congestion. When these symptoms set in, most people want to know which virus they have. But when you're coming down with something that feels like the flu, the last thing you want to do is leave the comfort of your home. Luckily, there are now at-home flu tests that you can order online without a prescription. These tests can tell you if you have the flu (influenza) or COVID-19. There are also home flu tests that check you for RSV (respiratory syncytial virus). Since there are some treatment options available, it helps to know which virus you have.Which home flu test kit should you buy? How do at-home flu tests work?There are a few different flu test kits available for over-the-counter (OTC) purchase. Let's review some of the most common kits below.Promotional disclosureinfo. outlinedSearch is powered by a third party. By clicking a topic in the advertisement above, you agree that you will visit a landing page with search results generated by a third party, and that your personal identifiers and engagement on this page and the landing page may be shared with that party. GoodRx may receive compensation in relation to your search.Pixel by LabcorpPixel by Labcorp is the only fully FDA-approved home test for the flu. It's available for anyone ages 2 years and older. It also tests for RSV and COVID. This is helpful since these three viruses share many of the same symptoms.Pixel uses a nasal swab to test for the flu, similar to rapid COVID tests. But it's not a rapid test. You have to mail the sample to the lab. And it can take 1 to 2 days to get results. This is a major downside since treatment for flu should be started within 48 hours of symptom onset. If you use this test, you might not get your results in time to start treatment. It's also the most expensive home flu test available.Lucira by PfizerLucira by Pfizer is another option. While it hasn't been FDA-approved, it has been authorized for emergency use. This means that while it hasn't been fully studied, the FDA thinks that the benefits of using it likely outweigh the risks. This is a molecular test, making it similar in accuracy to a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test. Unlike the Pixel test, you can do this test at home with a nasal swab and get your results in 30 minutes. Lucira tests for both flu and COVID, but not RSV.OSOM by Sekisui, CorDx by TyFast, and iHealth Covid and FluOSOM by Sekisui, CorDx by TyFast, and iHealth Covid and Flu are three other home flu tests. These kits check for both flu and COVID, but not RSV. Unlike Pixel and Lucira, these tests are antigen tests. Antigen tests are the least accurate type of test, with a higher likelihood of false negative results. This means that the test may show a negative result even if you really have the flu or COVID. But these tests are the quickest and most affordable options. EXPERT PICKS: WHAT TO READ NEXTTimeline to recovery for the flu: Find out when you can expect your symptoms to improve and when the flu will resolve.Can you get the flu twice in the same season? Yes. Find out how common it is to get the flu back to back.Ready to bounce back from the flu? Learn more about how you can recover faster from the flu.You can get results in as little as 10 minutes, and the cost is about \$10 to \$15. These tests also use a nasal swab and are authorized for emergency use by the FDA.Where can you buy a home flu test?These days, you can pick up a home flu test in most pharmacies. You can also buy them online, either directly from the manufacturer's website or from marketplaces like Amazon. You can't need a prescription to get a home flu test. The cost of a home flu test varies based on the type of test you buy. A rapid antigen test for flu and COVID can cost as little as \$13. A PCR test like the Pixel, which tests for flu, COVID, and RSV, can cost as much as \$129. Health insurance companies used to cover the cost of these tests. But it's now unlikely that your health insurance will pay for a home flu test. So, you'll have to cover the cost out of pocket. Because they're considered healthcare expenditures, you may be able to use a health savings account (HSA) or flexible spending account (FSA) to pay for the test. It's a good idea to contact your HSA or FSA program administrator to make sure they approve this as an eligible expense.How to test for the flu at homeTo test for the flu at home, you'll need to collect your own sample by swabbing your nose. For the test result to be accurate, you need to get a good sample. Each test comes with its own set of instructions that you need to follow. In general, all home tests follow the same basic steps:Wash your hands before you touch the swab.Similar to a COVID test, swab each nostril for about 15 seconds.Adults can collect their own sample, but you should collect samples for children ages 2 to 13. Teens can collect their own sample with supervision.If the test is a mail-in kit, send it to the lab using the prepaid package. If the test is a home kit, you'll need to run the test yourself. This particular step will vary depending on the test. But it usually involves mixing the nasal swab with a liquid and inserting the liquid into the test kit. Don't worry, they're usually pretty easy to figure out. The mail-in test takes about 1 to 2 days to get your result. You can see your results online. Home tests, on the other hand, take 10 to 30 minutes to give results. For each virus, the test will list a positive or negative result.A positive result means the virus was detected. A negative result means the virus was not detected. When is the best time to use a home flu test?To get the most accurate results, test as soon as you start having flu symptoms and within 4 days. If you wait longer, there might not be enough flu virus in your nasal swab for the test to detect it. This means you could get a false-negative result.Also, treatment for the flu is most effective if started within 48 hours (2 days) of the start of symptoms. This is another important reason to take the home flu test as soon as you start feeling sick.How accurate is the home flu test?The most accurate flu test is a PCR test, like the Pixel by Labcorp. PCR tests can detect even small amounts of the virus. Since the test detects genetic material unique to the flu, you can be confident in your results. Unfortunately, since the PCR test is a mail-in test, it takes the longest to get results.Molecular tests, like the Lucira by Pfizer, are similar in accuracy to PCR tests. The Lucira test uses a technology called RT-LAMP (reverse transcription loop-mediated isothermal amplification). Like PCR tests, molecular tests also check for genetic material, so they're very accurate when the test is positive.Lastly, the OSOM, CorDx, and iHealth tests are antigen tests. These tests look for a specific protein that's part of the virus. While quick and affordable, antigen tests are the least accurate. What does a negative result mean?If you have a negative result, it means the test didn't detect the flu in your sample. But it's possible that you have a false-negative result. This means the test is negative, but you actually have the flu. This is more likely to happen if you tested too early, when the virus just started replicating in your body. You tested too late, beyond the peak of virus levels. You didn't get a good sample. If your symptoms are getting worse rather than better, it may be worth testing again. Or you can call your primary care provider. They can help you figure out the next step. Even with a negative result, it's still important to prevent spreading your infection to others. Practice good hand hygiene and keep your distance from others — especially those at higher risk of infection. This includes people with weakened immune systems, young children, and older adults.What does a positive home flu test result mean?If you have a positive result, it means the test detected the flu virus. If you're healthy and feel like your symptoms are manageable, you may be able to recover from the flu at home. But it's often best to contact a healthcare professional to figure out if you need treatment. This is especially true for:Adults over the age of 65Children under the age of 5Those who are pregnantPeople who have chronic health conditions, like lung disease, heart disease, or diabetesAnyone with a weakened immune systemBut even for healthy people, the flu can be serious. So, it's best to get medical attention if your symptoms are worsening after the first 3 to 4 days. This is especially important if you feel like your symptoms are severe and you have:Trouble breathingWheezingChest painConfusion or dizzinessExtreme weaknessRepeated vomitingA severe headache that won't go awayFever over 103°Frequently asked questionsWhich home flu test is the most accurate?expand moreThe Pixel by Labcorp is the most accurate home flu test. The technology it uses is most likely to pick up the flu virus when present in your sample. But since it takes a while to get the results, it could be hard to get your results in time to start treatment.Can you get Tamiflu over the counter? expand moreTamiflu is an antiviral medicine that treats the flu and is only available by prescription. If you test positive for flu at home, contact a healthcare professional right away to start treatment. Remember, Tamiflu works best if you take it within 48 hours of symptom onset. If you can't get into a clinic quickly, you can try a local urgent care or use a telemedicine service.Written by:Farzon A. Nahvi, MDDr. Nahvi is an emergency medicine physician and author of "Code Gray: Death, Life, and Uncertainty in the ER." He works clinically at Concord Hospital in Concord, New Hampshire, and is a clinical assistant professor of emergency medicine at the Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth. Prior to this, he worked as an ER physician and clinical assistant professor of emergency medicine at the Mount Sinai Health System, NYU Langone Health, NYC Health + Hospitals/Bellevue, and the Manhattan VA. He is a graduate of Cornell University and NYU School of Medicine.Edited by:Karla Robinson, MDKarla Robinson, MD, is a medical editor for GoodRx. She is a licensed, board-certified family physician with almost 20 years of experience in health through varied clinical, administrative, and educational roles.Our editorial standardsMeet our expertsGet the facts on Flu.Sign up for our newsletter to get expert tips on condition management and prescription savings.By signing up, I agree to GoodRx's Terms and Privacy Policy, and to receive marketing messages from GoodRx. Key takeaways:There are at-home flu tests that give you results in as little as 15 minutes.You can buy these tests online without a prescription. You can use your health savings account (HSA) or flexible spending account (FSA) account to help cover the cost.There's treatment available for the flu, and it's best to start it within 48 hours of your symptoms starting. info. outlinedPromotional disclosureCourtesy of LabcorpA lot of different viruses can cause fever, cough, and congestion. When these symptoms set in, most people want to know which virus they have. But when you're coming down with something that feels like the flu, the last thing you want to do is leave the comfort of your home. Luckily, there are now at-home flu tests that you can order online without a prescription. These tests can tell you if you have the flu (influenza) or COVID-19. There are also home flu tests that check you for RSV (respiratory syncytial virus). Since there are some treatment options available, it helps to know which virus you have.Which home flu test kit should you buy? 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Prior to this, he worked as an ER physician and clinical assistant professor of emergency medicine at the Mount Sinai Health System, NYU Langone Health, NYC Health + Hospitals/Bellevue, and the Manhattan VA. He is a graduate of Cornell University and NYU School of Medicine.Edited by:Karla Robinson, MDKarla Robinson, MD, is a medical editor for GoodRx. She is a licensed, board-certified family physician with almost 20 years of experience in health through varied clinical, administrative, and educational roles.Our editorial standardsMeet our expertsGet the facts on Flu.Sign up for our newsletter to get expert tips on condition management and prescription savings.By signing up, I agree to GoodRx's Terms and Privacy Policy, and to receive marketing messages from GoodRx.