

## How to Get Free COVID Tests in the Mail Again

Beginning Sept. 25, each household can order another round of free tests from the government

By

Rachel Nania,

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Americans will once again be able to receive free at-home COVID-19 tests through the U.S. mail. Beginning Sept. 25, households can order four tests on the website [covidtests.gov](https://covidtests.gov).

The news comes amid a steady increase in COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations, which [topped 20,000](#) the week of Sept. 9, and it coincides with the emergence of new [coronavirus variants](#) that have gotten better at evading immunity from vaccines or previous infections.

The COVID-19 tests being distributed by the federal government are capable of detecting the variants currently circulating, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services confirmed, and they are expected to remain effective through the end of the year.

## Testing is especially important for older adults

Experts say rapid, easy-to-use tests are key to avoiding a wave of illness

this winter. For one, testing can help to cut down on virus transmission. “We know how to avoid spreading [COVID-19] to people,” David Montefiori, director of the Laboratory for AIDS Vaccine Research and Development at Duke University Medical Center, said in a recent news briefing. “You still want to avoid being in public and being around other people so that they don't get it.”

## Are Your Tests Expired?

Has it been a while since you tapped into your supply of COVID-19 tests? You'll want to check their expiration dates.

You can find the expiration date printed on the outer box or package. Some of these dates, however, have been extended, and you can find the extended expiration dates listed on the [Food and Drug Administration's website](#).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [recommends isolating from others](#) for at least five days if you have COVID-19.

A positive test is also the first step to accessing [treatments like Paxlovid](#) that can prevent a mild infection from turning severe. And, says William Schaffner, M.D., with the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases, “the sooner you initiate the treatment, the greater the benefit to you.”

Older adults are among those at highest risk for a serious case of COVID-19. Hospital admission rates for people 65 and older continue to tower over those for younger age groups, federal data shows, and death rates for those age 75-plus remain the highest.

From the beginning of 2022 through the spring of 2023, the federal government distributed more than 755 million free COVID-19 tests to more than two-thirds of American households. In addition, Medicare covered over-the-counter tests for enrollees, as did many private insurance plans. Those benefits expired, however, with the [end of the public health emergency](#) in May, forcing many who have since wanted COVID tests to pay for them out of pocket.

At-home COVID tests cost around \$10 each, or about \$20 for a pack of

two. The government still offers free testing for people without insurance; you can find testing locations on the [CDC's website](#).

Along with a new batch of free tests, Americans also have access to [new COVID-19 vaccines](#) that better target the latest versions of the coronavirus. The vaccines, approved Sept. 11, are available in many doctor's offices and pharmacies throughout the country.

For the first time, the shots are not universally covered by the federal government. However, [they will remain free for many people](#) with Medicare, Medicaid and private insurance plans. A [bridge program](#), launched by the CDC, will make the vaccines free for the uninsured and underinsured. You can find vaccine locations on [vaccines.gov](#).

*Rachel Nania writes about health care and health policy for AARP.*