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How to tell if covid test is expired

With COVID-19 cases increasing, Americans are once again relying on rapid at-home tests to detect the virus. Many people still have free test kits provided by the government, but concerns arise when expiration dates have passed, leaving questions about effectiveness. Some tests, like those from Abbott and Acon Laboratories, can be used past their printed expiration date due to FDA extensions. However, if a test is truly expired, its results cannot be trusted as the components may degrade over time, potentially delivering inaccurate or invalid results. (Note: The original text has been rewritten with occasional spelling errors (SE) while maintaining its overall meaning and readability.) MoneyWatch journalist covers various topics such as small business, workplace health care and consumer spending regularly appears on CBS News. If you have old COVID rapid tests check if they're still valid. Some manufacturers extended expiration dates or recalled ineffective ones. Using an expired test may provide inaccurate results due to broken down testing materials. Dr Luis Ostrosky chief of infectious diseases with UHealth Houston advises against using expired tests for accurate results. However, if no other option is available, ensure the control line shows up after squeezing liquid into the test strip a pink or purple line should appear at the top of valid COVID tests. Manufacturers may extend expiration dates on COVID at-home tests due to further testing within their facility Jamie Alin associate professor in pharmacology and toxicology suggests believing extended dates if they're listed by the FDA. The FDA maintains a list of COVID at-home tests with extended expiration dates check lot numbers to see if old tests are still valid. If your test result shows up as positive on an expired test you're likely positive but negative readings may be unreliable even with unexpired tests. Most at-home COVID tests have a shelf life of four to 24 months keeping them in direct sunlight or freezing temperatures for too long can impact results. Tests should stay between 36-86°F but different manufacturers may have their own recommendations. The FDA has issued warnings and recalls for some COVID at-home tests throw these away regardless of expiration date or control line. COVID-19 tests in green and white packaging, SD Biosensor STANDARD Q COVID-19 Ag Home Test, and ACON Biotech Flowflex SARS-CoV-2 Antigen Rapid Test (Self-Testing) in dark blue box. Check lot numbers on FDA website to see if any belong to recalls. Verify expiration dates for old or expired tests; using an expired test can lead to inaccurate results. Information current as of listed date, but newer info may be available when read. For latest updates on COVID-19, visit coronavirus news page. With allergy season here, many are finding symptoms unclear: Is it allergies, cold, or COVID? An at-home COVID test can help. Check FDA website for brands with extended shelf life. If you're considering using at-home COVID-19 tests that have had their expiration dates extended by the FDA, check the manufacturer's website for confirmation. To locate your test's lot number, examine the box sticker, which usually includes both numbers and letters. Be cautious, as according to the FDA, if the lot number or original expiration date is missing or states "Expiration Date: See box label," do not use the test beyond its original expiration date. If you're unsure about using an expired test, check the FDA's website for any extensions. Expired COVID-19 Tests: Can They Give You a False Positive? The notion that an expired COVID-19 test would yield a false positive is not supported by scientific evidence, according to Dr. Rhoads. False negatives are the primary concern when using an expired test, as antibodies may have degraded, leading to reduced detection capabilities for the virus. It is recommended to use at-home tests that are not expired or opt for polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing if symptoms are present or close contact with someone who has COVID-19 has occurred. To maintain the accuracy of at-home COVID-19 tests, store them in a cool, dry place and keep them in their original packaging. Extreme temperatures can affect test results, making it essential to store tests away from children and pets. If you want to have a reliable testing option on hand, consider keeping one at home. The FDA recommends testing multiple times for antigen tests and every couple of days if symptoms are present or close contact has occurred. While at-home tests may lose accuracy after expiration, some types of tests may still be reliable right before or just after the printed expiration date. A test's shelf life is not always accurately represented by the printed expiration date, as manufacturers have only recently begun studying their long-term stability. COVID rapid tests typically expire between 4-6 months after manufacturing. If stability tests show a longer shelf-life, the FDA might extend the expiration date. Always check the expiration date before using a test and look up if it's been extended on the FDA website. They have a list of at-home tests with their updated expiration dates. The FDA is the final say on whether an expired rapid test is still usable. You can use what looks like an expired test if the FDA has extended its shelf-life, as stated by Reich. Rapid tests usually contain two parts that expire: vials of liquid and testing strips. These components break down over time, making the test less reliable. "If antibodies or antigens on a rapid test degrade, it can lead to false negatives," explained Dr. Kanjilal. However, some newer research suggests that certain tests might still be effective months after their expiration date, especially if you have symptoms or knew someone with COVID-19. If you have no symptoms and no known exposure but get a positive at-home test, follow up with a PCR to confirm. If you have symptoms but get a negative at-home result, also confirm it with a PCR. Expired tests that haven't had their expiration date extended should be disposed of properly in your trash and replaced with new ones. Avoid using expired tests whenever possible and opt for fresh rapid tests or PCRs instead. There are already many factors that affect whether someone tests positive for COVID, so an expired test adds more uncertainty. However, some tests might still be accurate near their expiration date or have been extended by the FDA. If you have doubts about using an expired COVID-19 test, consult with a healthcare provider. Thanks for your feedback! Español Many at-home COVID-19 tests have extended expiration dates, so it's possible to use them even after the printed expiration date. To check if your test has an extended expiration date, refer to the list of extended expiration dates. The table below lists FDA-authorized at-home OTC COVID-19 diagnostic tests, including information on expiration dates, who can use the test, and other details that may help you decide which test is right for you. Given article text here of your test. If the expiration date has been extended, then the Expiration Date column states "Extended Expiration Date" and links to a document that lists the lot numbers, original expiration dates, and the extended expiration dates. If your lot number and/or original expiration date do not appear, or if the Expiration Date column states "Expiration Date: See box label," do not use the test beyond the original expiration date on your test. Search the table below by manufacturer, test name, or other details shown in the table to find more information on the test, including if the expiration date has been extended. To see complete information on smaller screens, select the blue plus (+) button beside the test name. Manufacturer and Test Name (Links to Instructions for Use) Expiration Date Who can use this test: Symptoms Who can use this test: Age Other Details Abbott Diagnostics Scarborough, Inc.: BinaxNOW COVID-19 Ag Card Home Test People with symptoms that began within the last 7 days. The test is to be performed two times over three days (serial testing). People without symptoms. The test is to be performed three times over five days (serial testing). Age 15 years and older Age 2 years and older when collected by an adult Antigen test Nasal swab Requires supervision of a telehealth provider and a smartphone or computer Results in 15 minutes Shelf Life: 22 months Abbott Diagnostics Scarborough, Inc.: BinaxNOW COVID-19 Antigen Self Test People with symptoms that began within the last 7 days. The test is to be performed two times over three days (serial testing). People without symptoms. The test is to be performed three times over five days (serial testing). Age 15 years and older Age 2 years and older when collected by an adult Antigen test Nasal swab Results in 15 minutes Shelf Life: 22 months Access Bio, Inc.: CareStart COVID-19 Antigen Home Test Alternate brand name: People with symptoms that began within the last 7 days The test is to be performed two times over three days (serial testing). Age 14 years and older Age 2 years and older when collected by an adult Antigen test Nasal swab Smartphone optional Alternate brand name: On/Go COVID-19 Antigen Self Test Results in 10 minutes Shelf Life: 21 months ACON Laboratories, Inc.: Flowflex COVID-19 Antigen Home Test Alternate brand name: People with symptoms that began within the last 7 days The test is to be performed two times over three days (serial testing). Age 2 years and older when collected by an adult Antigen test Nasal swab Smartphone optional Alternate brand name: On/Go One COVID-19 Antigen Home Test Results in 15 minutes Shelf Life: 24 months Aptitude Medical Systems Inc.: Matrix COVID-19 Test People with or without symptoms Age 14 years and older Age 2 years and older when collected by an adult Molecular test Nasal swab Saliva Requires a Matrix Reader (sold separately) Smartphone optional Results in 30 minutes Shelf Life: 18 Months CorDx, Inc.: CorDx TyFast Flu A/B & COVID-19 At Home Multiplex Rapid Test People with symptoms that began within the last 5 days. The test is to be performed two times over three days (serial testing). Age 14 years and older Age 2 years and 8 months when collected by an adult When it comes to at-home COVID-19 antigen testing, there are several options available. Here's a summary of some popular tests: ##### Ellume COVID-19 Home Test - Results in 15-30 minutes - Shelf Life: 20 months - Suitable for people aged 16 years and older, or those under 2 when collected by an adult - Requires nasal swab and smartphone ##### Genabio COVID-19 Rapid Self-Test Kit - Results in 15 minutes - Shelf Life: 12 months - Suitable for people aged 14 years and older, or those under 2 when collected by an adult - Requires mid-turbinate nasal swab and smartphone ##### Health Labs, Inc. - iHealth COVID-19 Antigen Rapid Test - Results in 15-30 minutes - Shelf Life: 18 months - Suitable for people aged 15 years and older, or those under 2 when collected by an adult - Requires nasal swab (smartphone optional) ##### InBios International Inc - sCOV-2 Ag Detect Rapid Self-Test - Results in 15 minutes - Shelf Life: 13 months - Suitable for people aged 14 years and older, or those under 2 when collected by an adult - Requires nasal swab ##### Immunostics Inc. - Swab-N-Go Home Test COVID-19 Ag - Results in 20 minutes - Shelf Life: 13 months - Suitable for people aged 14 years and older, or those under 2 when collected by an adult - Requires molecular test and smartphone Given article text here People without symptoms. Serial testing should be performed three times over five days for people aged 14 years and older, or twice over three days for those under 18 with no symptoms. The test should also be done for people who began showing symptoms within the last 5, 7, or 4 days for some brands respectively. Results in 15 minutes and have a shelf life of 24 months. Antigen tests are used. Nasal swabs are necessary for testing. The text describes the usage guidelines for various at-home COVID-19 antigen tests. These tests are divided into several categories based on their manufacturers, including SD Biosensor, Siemens Healthineers, Watmind USA, Xiamen Boson Biotech Co., Ltd., SEKISUI Diagnostics, LLC., Beijing Hotgen Biotech Co., Ltd., CorDX, Inc., and Azure Biotech Inc. Each test has specific requirements for its use, such as the age range of the individuals taking the test (14 years and older or 2 years and older when collected by an adult), the presence of symptoms within a certain timeframe (6-7 days), and the number of tests to be performed over several days (serial testing). Additionally, some tests have specific shelf life requirements. People with symptoms that began within the last 5-7 days should get tested. Serial tests are allowed, but frequency varies. - Those without symptoms should also do serial tests. - For those 14 years old and up, or 2 years old when collected by an adult, testing is recommended. - Antigen tests use nasal swabs with quick results: 15-30 minutes - Shelf life for these tests is: + ASSURE-100: 24 months + Advin COVID-19 Antigen Test @Home: 12 months + GenBody COVID-19 Ag Home Test: 24 months + Azure FastStep: 24 months + Lucira by Pfizer: 18 months + Status COVID-19 Antigen Rapid Test: 24 months + Nano-Check COVID-19 Antigen At-Home Test: 24 months Shelf Life: 6 months BioToke USA, LLC:Bio-Self COVID-19 Antigen Home Test Expiration Date: See box labelPeople with symptoms that began within the last 7 days. The test is to be performed two times over three days (serial testing). People without symptoms. The test is to be performed three times over five days (serial testing)Age 14 years and olderAge 2 years and older when collected by an adultAntigen testNasal swabResults in 15-30 minutesShelf Life: 12 months3EO Health, Inc.:3EO Health COVID-19 Test Expiration Date: See box labelAge 14 years and olderAge 2 years and older when collected by an adultMolecular testNasal swabResults in 30 minutesShelf Life: 4 monthsSEKISUI Diagnostics, LLC:OSOM Flu SARS-CoV-2 Combo Home Test People with symptoms that began within the last 4 days. The test is to be performed two times over three days (serial testing).Age 14 years and olderAge 2 years and older when collected by an adultAntigen testNasal swabResults in 10-30 minutesShelf Life: 12 monthsWondfo USA Co., Ltd.WELLlife COVID-19 / Influenza A&B Home Test People with symptoms that began within the last 5 days. The test is to be performed two times over three days (serial testing).Age 14 years and olderAge 2 years and older when collected by an adultAntigen testNasal swabResults in 10 minutesShelf Life: 10 monthsiHealth Labs, Inc.:iHealth COVID-19/Flu A&B Rapid Test People with symptoms that began within the last 4 days. The test is to be performed two times over three days (serial testing).Age 14 years and olderAge 2 years and older when collected by an adultAntigen testNasal swabResults in 15 minutesShelf Life: 17 monthsACON Laboratories, Inc.:Flowflex Plus COVID-19 and Flu A/B Home Test People with symptoms that began within the last 6 days. The test is to be performed two times over three days (serial testing).Age 14 years and olderAge 2 years and older when collected by an adultAntigen testNasal swabResults in 15 minutesShelf Life: 21 monthsAptitude Medical Systems Inc.: Matrix COVID/Flu Test Expiration Date: See box labelAge 14 years and olderAge 2 years and older when collected by an adultMolecular testNasal swabResults in 20 minutesShelf Life: 12 monthsRelated Information: The FDA has extended the shelf life for some COVID-19 tests.Now that allergy season is here, many are finding themselves with symptoms asking: Is it allergies or a cold? COVID? Something else? Since allergies, colds and COVID can have symptoms that overlap, it can be difficult to figure out what you have. That's when an at-home COVID test can come in handy. Even if yours says it's expired, many tests have had their shelf lives extended past the expiration date.To determine whether your COVID test is still usable, you can check the at-home COVID-19 tests listed on the FDA's website to see which brands have had their shelf lives extended. COVID-19 Tests: How to Get Free At-Home Kits in the MailSee at CNETWhat do COVID-19 test expiration dates mean?The expiration date listed on your box of COVID-19 tests is the last day the test is expected to perform effectively. Generally, the FDA authorizes at-home test kits with a shelf life of about four to six months, but that shelf Can I use a COVID test kit after it expires? It's generally not recommended to use a COVID-19 test kit after its expiration date unless the FDA has extended the shelf life. The test parts can degrade or break down over time, leading to inaccurate results. However, if you're unsure about your test's expiration date, check the FDA's webpage for the latest information.