Better late than never, SA Covid self-test is here

by AUTHENTIA GOYESIEN

While Covid self-tests have long been available in the US, UK and Europe, South Africa has just caught up after the recent approval of a variant devised by a Cape Town biotech company.

Anthea Uys, head of Medical Diagnostics, recently got the green light from the South African National Health Laboratory Service (SANUS) to use the self-test kit.

The home test kit will work in tandem with a mobile app, instituted by biotech firm Athene Diagnostics. The test kit will be used to conduct the test, interpreting the result and reporting it directly to the national database.

The app, designed by a US-based company called TestoMed and validated by the National Health Laboratory Service is to ensure that the test can be conducted at home.

The test, which has been at months in the making, will be on shelves by the end of April and will cost around R150.

Uys said despite the pandemic being in a tail, none are still important to help keep Covid under control.

The test will also help the elderly and those with compromised immune systems.

The kit has also developed a stick test in distinguishing between flu and Covid-19.

“This is currently undergoing evaluations for regulators approval. We anticipate this to be ready from October 2022. We are also testing on saliva tests for Covid-19.

This is currently in development.”

Uys said Covid-19 “is still infecting people”.

“Travel restrictions in some countries will continue to apply for Covid-19 for a while to come,” Uys said.

“Home, test kits will be required. Wherever possible, people should be able to do the test in situ and the result will be available on the app.”

He attributed the delay in approving the test to the regulatory process of getting both the test kit and app approved by authorities.

“Indexing rapid diagnostic kits (RDTs) are required to undergo an analytical validation by the National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS) before they can be sold,” Uys said.

“Because our test kit comes with a companion app, the regulatory process has to comply with all the relevant guidelines and regulations,”

“This means the app was subjected to a multi-provincial study to determine whether or not it can successfully use the RDTs and to assess the accuracy of the test. The app was approved and the test kit came in a few months later.”

The South African National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS) said it had approved the test kit.

The South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) said in a statement self-testing was an important component of public health strategies worldwide.

“However, challenges exist with accurate and reliable self-administered, interpretation and collection of data that can come from difficulty in interpreting the result.”

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Prof Suleman Abdool Karim, Infectious diseases epidemiologist

According to the latest epidemiological report by the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, more than 4 million laboratory-confirmed Covid-19 cases had been documented in South Africa.

Of these, 2,000 cases were reported two weeks ago.

“They are important to make sure that we test as many people as possible to prevent transmission of the virus.”

He said the approval was exciting.

Uys said the tests were available everywhere in the world except here, and we look forward to that.”

He said the approval took time.

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