

Covid DIY home tests available off the shelf in SA soon

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South Africans will finally be able to buy Covid self tests off the shelves – at the end of April – after the **South African Health Products Regulatory Authority** (Sahpra) approved a locally-made self-test kit devised by a Cape Town biotechnologist.

The products have long been available in the UK, US and Europe, and once available here, will cost about R50, reports the ***Sunday Times***.

Ashley Uys, head of **Medical Diagnostech**, recently got the green light from Sahpra for the kit which will work in tandem with a mobile app, **HealthPulse TestNow**, designed to assist in conducting the test, interpreting the result, and reporting it directly to the national database.

The app was designed by US-based company **Audere** and has been validated by the **National Health Laboratory Services**.

Uys says despite the pandemic being in a lull, tests are still important to help keep it under control. He said Medical Diagnostech has also developed a test kit to distinguish between flu and Covid-19. "This is currently undergoing evaluations for regulatory approval and we expect it to be ready from October 2023."

According to the latest report by the **National Institute for Communicable Diseases** (NICD) – based on data collected up to 25 March – more than 4m laboratory-confirmed Covid-19 cases had been detected in South Africa.

Of these, 2 099 cases were reported two weeks ago.

Infectious diseases epidemiologist Professor Salim Abdool Karim said: "If we take the lessons we learnt from HIV, having a simple, rapid test that you can administer yourself is an important part of the tools that will help us best control these diseases."

He said pop-up test sites have become scarce in South Africa, and if people wanted tests these days, “ you have to go to a doctor or laboratory to have a swab taken”. He believes this could discourage testing.

“It becomes important, particularly for those who interact with older people, to have access to these rapid tests.” He said the approval took too long. “Eighteen months ago the tests were available everywhere in the world except here. We just took too long.”