How to order free at-home COVID-19 tests from the government

On Jan. 19, every home in the United States can order up to four free COVID-19 tests.

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By Danielle Campoamor

Starting Jan. 19, Americans will be able to order free at-home COVID-19 test kits from the government, in the Biden Administration's ongoing effort to curb the latest, record-breaking coronavirus surge.

Near the end of 2021, the Biden-Harris Administration announced it would be buying 500 million at-home tests to give to every US household for free — a purchase that is expected to cost around $4 billion, according to senior administration official who spoke to reporters during a press call. More than 420 million tests are already in contract, as administration officials work to "finalize the contracting of the last 80 million."

"The President committed to another 500 million just yesterday for a billion," the official said. "And we're not saying we're stopping there. And we're going to keep — keep moving forward to expand testing so that Americans have it both now and moving into the future."

At-home COVID tests have been difficult to come by due to the highly-contagious omicron variant and increased demand for on-hand tests.

"We're seeing unprecedented demand," John Koval, the director of public affairs for rapid diagnostics at Abbott, the makers of BinaxNow, told NBC News. "And we're sending them out as fast as we can make them. Despite public health guidance over the summer that caused the market for rapid testing to plummet, we never stopped making tests."

Here's everything you need to know about how you can order free COVID-19 test kits for your home:

Where can you find the tests?
Starting Jan. 19, people can visit https://www.covidtests.gov/ to order their free at-home tests.

The Biden Administration says it will also launch a free "call line to help those unable to access the website to place orders" and will "work with national and local community-based organizations to support the nation's hardest-hit and highest-risk communities in requesting tests," according to a White House written statement.

"We're taking a number of steps to ensure this program reaches our hardest-hit and highest-risk communities," one senior administration official said. "This includes working with national and local organizations with deep experience serving communities of color, people with disabilities, and other high-risk communities to serve as navigators who will raise awareness about this program and help people submit their requests for tests."

Studies have shown low-income and communities of color have a higher risk of contracting COVID-19, and are more likely to develop a serious illness if infected. Yet, the same communities are less likely to have access to adequate, affordable, and quick COVID-19 tests. One 2020 study found that communities of color "in many major cities face higher demand than sites in whiter or wealthier areas in those same cities," and that Black and Latin people were "more likely to experience longer wait times and understaffed testing centers."