

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Commissioner



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CT Department of Public Health (DPH) Policy for

At-home HIV (Self-Test) Initiative

Background:

Prevention services are a vital component in Public Health. High Impact Prevention (HIP) services, such as HIV Testing, Referral, and Linkage have proven to be the cornerstone in reducing HIV in populations most at risk. COVID-19 has dramatically altered the way we provided prevention services in Connecticut and the need to implement strategies to meet communities hardest hit by HIV is critical during this time. In March 2020, CT DPH launched the **Free At-home HIV Test initiative**, #RequestFreeHIVTestCT, as a pilot to enhance access to HIV testing for hard-to-reach populations, such as LGBTQ, and people of color. The At-home HIV Test Kit is an oral-swab rapid HIV test, that is self-administered in the privacy of one's home. The pilot began in March 2020 and the number of organizations participating continues to grow. In the spirit of true harm reduction philosophy, the initiative aims to meet people where they are. CT DPH HIV Prevention Program is committed to working with our community providers to continue to provide access to the prevention services during challenging times.

Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to assist participating organizations/agencies in developing their own At-home HIV Test program. This policy provides information on how to request the At-home HIV Test Kits, how to market the program using the CT DPH social media/marketing materials, how to collect data to report to CT DPH, and how to access additional resources and materials. To make this pilot initiative most efficient for public health, the DPH has developed the following guidance policy: CT DPH has centralized system for participating partner agencies to order At-home HIV Test Kits for distribution to their clients at no cost to the clients.

Policy Guidance:

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For Agencies to Request to Participate in the Pilot Program (Develop your own At-home HIV Test Program/Initiative):

- Agencies will send a 'Request to Participate' email to Venesha Heron and request the number of box(es) of kits based on their agency's needs and capacity to distribute to clients.
- Agencies will then arrange to pick up the At-home HIV Test kits from DPH.
- CT DPH will provide each agency with a policy guidance and additional resources and materials to support their development and marketing of their own At-home HIV Test program/initiative, as well as how collect and report the data to the DPH.

For Clients to Request Free At-home HIV Test kit from Partnering Agencies or from the DPH:

- Clients are engaged through the DPH social media campaigns and by participating agencies' social media platforms.
- To request the Free At-home HIV test kit, there are two methods a person could use to access the CT DPH At-home Test Kit Request Form (i.e., via Microsoft Forms). First, by visiting: <https://tinyurl.com/ctdphfreehivtest> Second, by scanning a 'QR code' that directs them to the Microsoft Forms.
- Access to the required CT DPH At-home Test Kit Request Form (i.e., via Microsoft Forms), using either <https://tinyurl.com/ctdphfreehivtest> or the provided QR code (see Fig 1).



Fig 1. Tinyurl and QR Code

*****Note to agencies and clients:**

- DPH requires all clients or an agency tester/counselor, on behalf of the client, to fill out the CT DPH At-home Test Kit Request Form prior to mailing or providing the client(s) with the kits.
- If eligible (being a CT resident and not previously testing positive for HIV), clients will be mailed an At-home HIV Test Kit. HIV test kits are manufactured by OraQuick Technologies and are shipped in **confidential** and **discreet** packaging. The kit includes easy to read instructions and if needed, a telephone number for any questions about the test.

- At-home HIV Test kits can also be hand-delivered to clients in a **confidential** and **discreet** manner, to safeguard the client(s) privacy and confidentiality.
- Per OraSure Technologies, the manufacturer of the At-home HIV Test Kits, during COVID-19 pandemic, the At-home HIV tests can also be administered in a rapid HIV test session manner, in a safe, secure, and confidential setting, while adhering to social distancing (COVID-19 pandemic shelter in place/social distance orders). See video link attached for information on Innovative Strategies for HIV Screening
During COVID-19: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kosVja3t6YQ&feature=youtu.be> [time: 9:34]

Marketing and Promotion:

- Participating agencies will create, customize, or use the DPH campaign using #RequestFreeHIVTestCT messaging campaign on agency social platforms or other outreach methods to the community, and will submit to DPH for review. The tiny url (i.e., <https://tinyurl.com/ctdphfreehivtest>) and the QR code to the CT DPH At-home Test Kit Request Form (i.e., via Microsoft Forms) can be used on agencies' promotional materials.
- Participating agencies will use share these materials on their respective social networking apps like Facebook, Instagram, agency webpage, Grindr, etc., to engage these hard-to-reach populations (clients).
- Participating agencies will develop and submit an At-home HIV Test Program Policy and Protocol to DPH for review. (This Policy and Protocol can be revised to reflect improvements and best practices and send to DPH for review)

Data Collection, Reporting, and Quality Improvement:

- Data collection is key to determining who DPH is reaching with this initiative—data collection is very important to monitor and evaluate At-home HIV testing activities and its outcomes
- Clients interested in the At-home HIV Test initiative will use the CT DPH At-home Test Kit Request Form (i.e., via Microsoft Forms), using either <https://tinyurl.com/ctdphfreehivtest> or the provided QR code (see above figure 1).
- Participating agencies are also encouraged to conduct additional client's risk assessment besides the data that is required and reported via the Microsoft Forms for the purpose of providing additional referrals and linkages, should the clients have other needs. This data will be used for future decision making.
- Participating agencies are required report to DPH any narrative information on successes and challenges with the HIV Test Initiative in DPH Tri-Annual Reports.
- Participating agencies are required to report to DPH any issues regarding follow-up and engagement, especially for clients that self-report HIV reactive results.
- Participating agencies are also required to provide monthly reports to DPH on requested data variables
- The overall number of At-home test kits distributed in Connecticut will be reported to the CDC aggregately, via EvaluationWeb.
- Agencies must develop their own agency protocols to submit to DPH for approval.

Confidentiality:

- All participating agencies shall adhere to the CT DPH Confidentiality and Security Standards when participating in any CT DPH pilot programs or initiatives. All testers who will be participating in the In Home HIV Test initiative must review the document in the hyperlink below: <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DPH/HIV-Surveillance/CT-DPH-TB-HIV-STD-Viral-Hepatitis-Data-Security-andConfidentiality-Policy-and-Procedures-2020.pdf>
- All participating organizations/agencies shall adhere to the CDC Principles for Data Collection, Storage, Sharing, and Use to Ensure Security and Confidentiality and protecting the privacy of clients served. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchhstp/programintegration/docs/PCSIDataSecurityGuidelines.pdf>

Mailing and Distribution:

- At-home HIV Test kits requests can be fulfilled through USPS shipment
- The range for shipping/postage can be anywhere from \$8.00 - \$8.85 with delivery between 1-3 days
- Clients will be sent the At-home HIV Test Kit within 1-2 business days of the request.
- The test kit includes detailed instructions; a video link demonstration on how to administer the test; information about non-reactive and reactive test results; confirmatory test information; PrEP, PEP; and U=U information. Agencies can also include other information and materials about HIV and STI prevention and care resources, condoms, lubrication packets and other informational materials as inserts.

Getting Results:

- Clients will get the results in the comfort of their own space/home, using an At-home Test Kit within 20 minutes of administering the test.
- Agencies should make every effort to engage with clients to inform them to self-report test results within 1-2 weeks of receiving their test kit in the mail, and in a safe and confidential manner.
- Some clients may report back with their results, some may not. If not, the agency should conduct a courtesy follow-up via phone call or in a **secure** and **confidential** manner and document any information in a secured log or secured files within 2 weeks of shipping the At-home HIV Test kits It is each agency's responsibility to ensure that clients/patients have access to services and linkages if needed and document the nature of the services provided or requested.
- To report newly diagnosed HIV positives from the At-home HIV Test Initiative, please refer to the [HIVHCV Rapid Testing Case Reporting Guidance Jan2023](#)

Resources:

Additional information about the #RequestFreeHIVTestCT initiative can be found below:

- The weblink to CT DPH At-home Test Kit Request Form is <https://tinyurl.com/ctdphfreehivtest>
- OraQuick home test kit materials: A PDF copy of the instruction card deck that is included with each test kit. When the participant opens the test kit, they will flip through the instruction cards, this PDF is a copy of those cards so that agency staff could review with the participant or use some of the graphics and instructions to assist in instructing the client.
- OraQuick provides access to videos and materials at <http://www.oraquick.com/> . The link below demonstrates instructions on how to take the test <http://www.oraquick.com/Taking-the-Test/HowTo-Video>
- Webinar recording: *Innovative Strategies for HIV Screening During COVID-19*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kosVja3t6YQ&feature=youtu.be>

For more information, contact Project Lead, Venesha Heron at Venesha.heron@ct.gov. DPH values our agencies continued commitment to HIV prevention during the COVID-19 pandemic and will continue to work with community to develop and provide additional guidance, resources, and technical assistance (TA) to support reducing HIV in Connecticut.