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Using expired covid test

You've got the usual COVID-19 symptoms - fever, cough, and exhaustion. But when you go to grab an at-home test from your medicine cabinet, you realize it's expired. Is it still safe to use? Will the results be accurate? Microbiologist Daniel Rhoads explains that yes, at-home rapid antigen tests for COVID-19 do expire. The parts of the test kit that don't expire are things like the swab, but the vials of liquid and testing strips have a limited shelf life. "These antibodies can go bad over time," Dr. Rhoads says. "They're little pieces of protein, so they can deteriorate over time." If there's liquid in the test, it can evaporate, making it difficult to conduct the test properly. But what happens if you use an expired test? Can you still get accurate results? According to Dr. Rhoads, checking the expiration date on the FDA website is a good idea. Many tests have had their expiration dates extended by several months. "If your test has been extended, it should work and give you accurate results," Dr. Rhoads says. However, if your test is truly expired, the FDA advises against using it to determine if you have COVID-19. An expired test won't give you a false positive result, but it might not detect the virus as well as it could when it was new. If you're experiencing symptoms or have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19, it's best to use an unexpired test or get a PCR test done. To store your at-home tests properly, keep them in their original packaging and in a cool, dry place - just like you would with medicine. Using at-home COVID-19 tests requires attention to their expiration dates. Extreme temperatures can also impact their accuracy. It's essential to store them out of reach of children and pets. If you need to test frequently, consider keeping a few on hand, advises Dr. Rhoads. Testing too soon after exposure may not yield accurate results. The FDA suggests repeating tests every couple of days if using antigen tests. Knowing your COVID-19 status can help prevent its spread and guide treatment decisions with your healthcare provider. Vaccination remains the best defense against severe COVID-19, along with staying up to date on recommended boosters. If you're unsure about an at-home test's expiration or accuracy, check the FDA website for manufacturer information and potential extended expiration dates. Expired Covid-19 Tests: What You Need To Know As the results might not be accurate, using an expired Covid-19 test can give you misleading information. Dr. Rhoads explains that getting a false positive from an expired test doesn't make sense scientifically. Instead, the concern is getting a false negative, which means the test may not detect the virus properly. Expiration dates and their implications on COVID-19 test accuracy. According to Alan, if a test result shows up as positive on an expired test, it's likely that you're positive. However, this is not the case with negative readings from expired tests, which should be approached with caution. Most at-home COVID-19 tests have a shelf life of four to 24 months. Nevertheless, they can be affected by external factors like temperature and sunlight exposure. According to Ostrosky, it's not ideal to use a test that has been exposed to incorrect temperatures. If the control line is working, then it's likely that the test is still functional. The FDA has issued warnings and recalls for certain COVID-19 at-home tests due to potential contamination or false results. If you have old COVID-19 tests, check their lot numbers on the FDA website to determine if they're part of a recall. Expired tests can lead to inaccurate results, so it's best to use a fresh test for more reliable outcomes. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, testing remains crucial for protection as Covid metrics rise. However, lab PCR tests have become more expensive and less accessible since the U.S. government ended the public health emergency in May. Some Americans may struggle to access at-home tests due to changes in insurance coverage. Local health clinics and community sites still offer free at-home tests to the public. Before purchasing new tests, check if expired ones in your medicine cabinet are still safe to use. Here's a guide on how to verify expiration dates. To check for extended expiration dates, visit the FDA website or search for your test brand directly. The FDA indicates whether each brand has an extended expiration date and provides links to PDFs with new expirations for specific test lots. Microbiologist Daniel Rhoads explains why at-home COVID-19 tests expire and what kind of results you may get if you use one. At-home rapid antigen COVID-19 tests expire, and certain parts like the vials of liquid and testing strips deteriorate over time. If a test is expired, it's essential to verify its actual expiration date before using it. Dr. Rhoads recommends checking the FDA website for verification and potential lot number comparisons. Expired COVID-19 tests can pose risks if used, Dr. Rhoads advises against using them to determine if you have COVID-19 due to potentially inaccurate results. Scientists argue that expired tests are more likely to produce false negatives rather than false positives. If the antibodies in an expired test stop working well, it may not detect the virus as accurately as when the test was first manufactured. If symptoms or close contact with someone who has COVID-19 are present, using a non-expired at-home test or a PCR test is recommended. Expired Covid tests may not always be reliable due to deteriorating chemicals that affect their ability to detect the virus. The tests rely on specific chemicals which break down over time, reducing their effectiveness. While some tests may still work past their expiration date, it's unclear how long this will last and manufacturers have had limited data to determine optimal shelf life. Recent studies suggest that many tests can remain effective for up to 2 years, prompting the FDA to extend expiration dates for some products. However, users should not rely on expired tests beyond their extended expiration dates, as they may provide inaccurate results, including false negatives. Expired COVID tests shouldn't give false positive results, advises Sudhakar. "I would recommend using an alternative test that hasn't expired or calling your primary care provider to get a PCR test done in the lab or clinic," he said. Expired tests will only yield negative results; never positive. If all your tests are expired, it's time to discard them. You can request free at-home test kits through COVIDtests.gov. These kits also link to other places offering free or low-cost tests. Additionally, you can obtain at-home tests without a prescription from local pharmacies. Your insurance may cover part of the cost, and these tests qualify as medical expenses for HSAs and FSAs. Unused medications from across the country are being collected. In 2023, this initiative gathered an impressive 332 tons of expired meds. One concern is that these medicines can break down over time and lose their potency. To gauge how long they remain effective, manufacturers often conduct accelerated stability testing on new products by exposing them to extreme temperatures and conditions. They then estimate the lifespan under normal circumstances. Many medications may still be usable beyond their expiration dates, even though they haven't undergone extensive testing. The FDA can update expiry dates if additional stability tests are performed. However, this is usually not necessary for most products. A crucial note is that extending expiry dates applies only to sealed packaging and unopened bottles, as exposure to air and humidity can speed up degradation. In the case of COVID rapid tests, updating expiry dates makes sense due to large stockpiles in households. If not updated, it would lead to unnecessary waste. With medications, degradation can compromise efficacy or cause harm. An expired EpiPen may not save a life during an allergic reaction. For COVID tests, there's less concern about safety and more about accuracy. The worry is that expired tests might produce false negatives rather than false positives. If you're unsure if your test has expired, it's best to assume it might be, which could lead to incorrect results. To avoid any doubt, getting a new test at a government vaccination centre when receiving flu/covid booster shots this fall is the simplest solution.