

EXPANDED TESTING AND MASK SUPPLIES

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COVID-19 has resurged in every state across the country, including in Hawai'i, due in large part to the highly transmissible Omicron variant. Increases in holiday travel and related gatherings plus lower observance of mask and social distancing guidelines also made our communities more vulnerable to the rapid spread of COVID-19 and its variants during the early winter months.

To address the sharp rise in COVID-19 infections and combat the virus without closing schools, businesses and communities, the federal government has launched several initiatives to expand access to COVID-19 testing and high-quality masks.

COVID-19 Tests

Free At-Home, Rapid COVID-19 Tests for Households

Starting January 19, 2022, the Biden Administration started mailing free, at-home rapid COVID-19 tests directly to households nationwide. Orders can be placed at [COVIDTests.gov](https://www.covidtests.gov). Tests will be shipped within 7 to 12 days of ordering. Shipments to Hawai'i will be sent via Priority Mail.

The Vaccine and Testing Hotline ([1-800-232-0233](tel:1-800-232-0233)) is also available for individuals that need to phone-in their orders for free at-home rapid tests, especially if they are experiencing difficulties with accessing the internet or need additional technical support.

Ensuring Equity and Reaching Hardest-Hit Communities

The Biden Administration is prioritizing processing orders for free at-home rapid tests to households experiencing the highest social vulnerability and in communities that have experienced a disproportionate share of COVID-19 cases and deaths. The federal government is also working with national and local organizations to raise awareness about the free testing program and to help people submit their orders.

To ensure equity and access for all, the Biden Administration is sending 25 million free at-home rapid tests to 1,400 community health centers and hundreds of food banks.

Requiring Health Insurers to Cover the Cost of At-Home COVID-19 Tests

Since January 15, 2022, private insurance companies have been required to cover at-home COVID-19 tests. This means consumers with private health insurance coverage will be able to get these tests for free. Insurance companies and health plans are required to cover eight free at-home tests per covered individual per month. That means a family of four, all on the same plan, would be able to get 32 of these tests covered by their health plan per month.

Individuals can also get at-home rapid tests directly through preferred pharmacies or retailers with no out-of-pocket costs, with the plan or insurer covering the cost upfront, eliminating the need for people to submit reimbursement claims.

Making 10 Million More Tests Available to Schools Nationwide

The federal government plans to distribute 5 million rapid tests to schools every month as well as make an additional 5 million PCR tests available through the Department of Health and Human Services to help schools safely remain open and implement screening testing and test-to-stay programs and supporting free testing access for students, school staff and families through federal testing sites.

N-95 Masks

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently updated its guidance on masks for the general public, stating that people may choose to wear N95 or KN95 masks because they offer the best protection against COVID-19. The CDC continues to recommend that individuals wear the most protective mask possible that fits well and can be worn consistently.

Well-fitting disposable surgical masks and KN95s respirators are more protective than all cloth masks. Well-fitted N95 respirators approved by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health offer the highest level of protection from particles, including COVID-19, because they can filter out 95 percent of all airborne particles when used correctly.

The CDC has created a ranking of commonly used face coverings from lowest to highest protection. For more information on types of masks and respirators, visit the [CDC's website](#).

Making N95 Masks Available to Americans for Free

The Biden Administration is making available 400 million N95 masks from the Strategic National Stockpile for free to Americans. The federal government is leveraging existing vaccination and testing programs to ensure ease and convenience of mask availability.

N95 masks will be available for the public to pick up (in packs of three and one pack per person) at tens of thousands of local pharmacies and thousands of community health center sites across the country. All masks are American made, newly sourced in spring 2020 and acquired over past two years.

The program will be operational by early February.

For more information on the Health Resources and Services Administration's Health Center N-95 Mask Program, visit [HRSA's website](#). You can view the list of participating health centers in Hawai'i [here](#).

Deployment of Personal Protective Equipment

Today, there is ample supply of high-quality masks for frontline workers, and high-quality masks are widely available to the American public online and in stores. In the last year, the number of N95 masks has tripled in the Strategic National Stockpile to more than 750 million, with 350 million reserved for healthcare workers and first responders.