

# Medicare enrollees to get free COVID-19 tests at drug stores

April 4 2022, by Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar

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A home COVID-19 test kit is held, Feb. 3, 2022, in Seattle. Medicare says that millions of enrollees will finally have access to free over-the-counter COVID-19 tests at drug stores. Monday's announcement comes amid worries that the latest coronavirus variant ---- BA.2 ---- will spark another rise in U.S. cases. Credit: AP Photo/Ted S. Warren, File

Amid worries that the latest coronavirus variant could spark another rise in cases, Medicare announced Monday that millions of enrollees will finally have access to free over-the-counter COVID-19 tests at drug stores.

More than 59 million people with Medicare's "Part B" outpatient coverage will be able to get up to eight free at-[home tests](#) per month, or enough for an individual to test twice a week, as some doctors have recommended.

Medicare has lagged [private insurance](#) in following the Biden administration's directive to cover at-home tests because rules and regulations stood in the way, and officials had to find a work-around. This is the first time the [health insurance program](#) for [older people](#) and those with disabilities has covered an over-the-counter test at no cost to recipients.

Medicare's move could turn out to be prescient.

The BA.2 [omicron variant](#) now accounts for more than half of U.S. cases, having rapidly overtaken the original strain. That initial omicron wave this winter caused the biggest spike yet in virus cases, straining many hospitals to the limit. Since then, cases nationally have rapidly dropped to the lowest level since before last summer's delta surge. Coronavirus restrictions have been largely lifted. [But some areas where BA.2 took hold early are seeing increasing cases.](#)

Monday's announcement followed another precautionary move last week, when [government health officials authorized a second round of booster shots](#) for people 50 and older as well as those with weakened immune systems.

National pharmacy chains participating in Medicare's give-away include:

Albertsons Companies, Inc., Costco Pharmacy, CVS, Food Lion, Giant Food, The Giant Company, Hannaford Pharmacies, H-E-B Pharmacy, Hy-Vee Pharmacy, Kroger Family of Pharmacies, Rite Aid Corp., Shop & Stop, Walgreens and Walmart.

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