

Headline	Home HIV test kits approved		
MediaTitle	Sunday Star		
Date	08 Jul 2012	Color	Black/white
Section	StarMag FitForLife	Circulation	320,964
Page No	I-12	Readership	1,072,000
Language	English	ArticleSize	192 cm ²
Journalist	N/A	AdValue	RM 4,237
Frequency	Weekly	PR Value	RM 12,711



Home HIV test kits approved

US regulators approve saliva test which provides result for HIV in 20 to 40 minutes.

THOUSANDS of people are expected to be able to find out whether they are HIV-positive in the privacy of their own home, following approval by the US regulator of a rapid over-the-counter test kit.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved OraSure's home test, which the company says will now be available at 30,000 retail outlets across America in October.

The saliva test provides a result in 20 to 40 minutes from a quick swab of the upper and lower gums in the mouth.

Until now, testing in most countries has been done almost exclusively in medical settings, with HIV specialists and counsellors close at hand so that people can get reassurance, support and immediate treatment, if they need it.

But estimated figures suggest that of the 1.2 million Americans with HIV, at least a fifth do not know they have it, and a quarter of more than 86,000 with the virus in Britain are similarly unaware. Many who are at risk will

not go to clinics. And some buy unapproved, illegal and inaccurate tests online.

The approval in the US was applauded by HIV experts and campaigners. Dr Mariangela Simao of UNAIDS said it was important to offer new ways of testing to people who may not want their status disclosed in a clinic.

There are 34 million people with HIV, many of whom do not know it, she said. "Any means that can ensure people have access and opportunities to be tested, and that are not mandatory should be encouraged."

UNAIDS hopes home testing will be available in developing countries, but the price will have to come down considerably from

OraSure's prediction of somewhere under US\$60 (RM180) if that is to happen.

There are still concerns that the test may not always give the right result, which will either make people unnecessarily anxious or may lead them to take risks. Clinical trials of the OraSure test showed it was accurate 92% of the time in diagnosing people who had HIV. But that means about one in every 12 test results would be a false negative, which may encourage people to think they can indulge in unprotected sex.

False positives – where an uninfected person wrongly gets a positive result – were more rare at one in every 5,000. In May, an

FDA advisory committee of outside experts voted unanimously in favour of the test, saying its ability to prevent new HIV infections and link people to medical care and social services outweighed the risk of false results.

The test will come with details of a helpline and access to counselling for those with a positive result, who will also be urged to have it confirmed by a doctor. In medical settings, testing is always linked to counselling.

Lisa Power of the Terrence Higgins Trust said: "We are absolutely delighted at the announcement. It marks a real sea change."

Those who are anxious about the outcome of an HIV test should be urged to go to a clinic and not try to cope at home, she said, adding: "But there are a lot of people now who are buying illegal tests off the internet of very poor quality." Patient choice is important, she said, and if people want to take a test at home, they should be able to. – Guardian News & Media