

Global partnership to make COVID-19 rapid tests available for LMIC

29 September 2020 | News

Agreements between the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and test manufacturers Abbott and SD Biosensor make available innovative tests priced at a maximum of \$5 for low- and middle-income countries (LMICs)



A set of agreements to make available, for low and middle-income countries, affordable, high-quality COVID-19 antigen rapid tests were announced by the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator.

Organizations involved in the milestone agreement include the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI), the Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND), the Global Fund, Unitaaid, and the World Health Organization (WHO).

As part of this comprehensive, end-to-end effort, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has executed separate volume guarantee agreements with rapid diagnostic test (RDT) producers Abbott and SD Biosensor.

These two arrangements will make available to LMICs 120 million antigen rapid diagnostic tests (Ag RDTs) – priced at a maximum of \$5 per unit – over a period of six months. These tests provide results in 15–30 minutes, rather than hours or days, and will enable expansion of testing, particularly in countries that do not have extensive laboratory facilities or trained health workers to implement molecular (polymerase-chain reaction or PCR) tests.

The tests developed by Abbott and SD Biosensor are highly portable, reliable, and easy to administer, making testing possible in near-person, decentralized healthcare settings. Both companies' tests are faster and cheaper than laboratory-based tests, enabling countries to increase the pace of testing, tracing and treating people for COVID-19 at the point of care particularly in areas with under-resourced health systems. A number of other Ag RDTs are at various stages of development and assessment.

To scale up the Ag RDTs, the Global Fund has announced that it has made available an initial \$50 million from its COVID-19 Response Mechanism to enable countries to purchase at least 10 million of the new rapid tests for LMICs at the guaranteed price, with the first orders expected to be placed this week through the Global Fund's pooled procurement mechanism.

FIND and WHO are working together to accelerate appropriate use by supporting implementation research that will optimize

Ag RDT use in multiple LMICs, in line with WHO guidance. This includes provision of catalytic volumes of tests to understand how Ag RDTs can best fit into health systems.