



## BIOMEDICINE

# More Do-It-Yourself Medical Tests

*A startup thinks it can make at-home tests more useful to patients and doctors.*

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**Health care at home:** A prototype of QuickCheck Health's home test reveals an encrypted code that the user enters into a website to learn the results. Credit: QuickCheck Health

Over the last few years, a small slice of medicine has moved out of the doctor's office and into clinics at CVS, Walmart, or other retail outlets. **QuickCheck Health**, a startup based in Excelsior, Minnesota, aims to push this trend further by bringing more diagnostic testing to the home. The company is developing tests for urinary tract infections, strep throat, and other ailments that will be sold at drugstores for consumers to use at home.

While consumer diagnostic tests are already in use for pregnancy, ovulation, fertility, HIV, and other conditions, treatment or follow-up care requires a visit to the doctor. At-home tests for other conditions, such as urinary tract infections, are available, but most doctors are reluctant to prescribe antibiotics or other medication without validating the results.

QuickCheck Health plans to change that by requiring patients to log on to a website or call to learn the results of the test. If the test is positive, the user will be directed to an online health-care provider, who can prescribe treatment.

"The consumer doesn't know what they have until they check in online or via phone, and the remote provider has confidence that this was a positive test," says QuickCheck CEO Tom Henke. "That confirmation makes us different, and valuable to consumers and physicians."



The tests employ existing chemical assays to detect infections or other issues using urine samples or a throat swab. The company has developed proprietary hardware to encode the results, as well as software for the website and database that patients and physicians will access. It plans to partner with networks of health-care providers across the country that would check the results via QuickCheck's interface and provide prescriptions.

The company has developed a prototype of its urinary tract infection test and is planning trials to get consumer feedback on the design. It aims to get approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration later this year. QuickCheck hopes customers will be attracted to the allure of greater convenience and less cost. An emergency room visit for strep can cost \$650, and a doctor's visit costs about \$200, even though the cost of a strep test is about \$2 and the cost of the antibiotics to treat it is about \$4. A visit to a retail health clinic, while cheaper, is still about \$70, according to Henke. QuickCheck aims for a retail cost of \$10 to \$15 for the test, and \$35 for the physician's assessment.

"They make a good case that the cost of managing certain medical problems that are relatively straightforward and acute could be lowered when done outside of the primary-care office," says Joe Weidner, a family practice physician at [Stone Run Family Medicine](#) in Maryland. Weidner is considering partnering with QuickCheck Health as one of its online health-care providers.

Moving health care out of the doctor's office could also help deal with the shortage of primary-care providers, especially in rural areas where there are few retail health clinics. "My personal bias is that anything we can do to decentralize health-care delivery is moving us in a better direction," says [Joseph Kvedar](#), founder of the Center for Connected Health at Partners Healthcare. "Right now there is much more demand than people to provide care, so anything that moves care into the home is likely to be helpful economically and clinically in the long run."

QuickCheck will likely encounter some of the same hurdles that retail health clinics first faced, including questions about the accuracy of the tests or possible complications that can occur in rare cases. But both Kvedar and Weidner say they like the fact that the process requires the user to log onto a website, opening a line of communication between patients and doctors. QuickCheck can also follow up with users to see if those with negative results are feeling better; if not, a second test might be warranted.