

# Q-health

## New rapid HIV test is leap forward for prevention

by Mark Shields

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Food and Drug Administration has announced that the first oral, rapid HIV test — known as OraQuick — which can deliver results in 20 minutes, has been approved for use.

"This is a vital new tool for preventing new HIV infections and getting life-prolonging treatment to those already infected," said Cheryl Jacques, HRC president. "Everyone should know their status to protect their own health and the health of their loved ones."

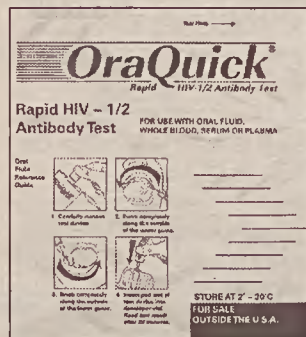
Some 40,000 people are infected each year with HIV and approximately 300,000 men, women and children are unknowingly infected, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"HIV testing should be rapid, accurate and confidential," continued Jacques. "By offering a pain-free testing mechanism and reducing wait time for results, this new test could

increase testing rates."

"In addition to testing advances, it is critical that Congress and the administration fund strategic prevention programs at the CDC," added Jacques. "Infection rates of gay and bisexual men are rising and we need well-funded, science-based approaches to halt this alarming trend."

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration said OraQuick



**OraQuick can now be used along the gums.**

can now be used to detect HIV in saliva by swiping the device along a person's gums. Previously, OraSure's device, which gives results in 20 minutes, was approved only for use with blood.

Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson, at a news conference in Washington, D.C., called the development "an important step in the war against AIDS in America and around the world."

"It's a step that will help us accomplish the most fundamental mission — to save lives and improve health," he said.

"This is the biggest milestone we've had at this company," said OraSure co-founder and Chief Executive Officer Mike Gausling.

In the war against AIDS, faster HIV testing is considered better because it increases the likelihood that the results will reach those infected with the virus. Most people who get a conventional blood test now wait a week or more for results. But at least 8,000 people a year who test positive never return to a clinic to get the news. That means they don't start life-extending treatments or learn how to avoid transmitting the virus to others.

One of the key advantages of oral testing is it's safer than using blood, explained Dr. Bernard Branson of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

Agencies that give blood-based tests have to offer a range of protective services, such as hepatitis B shots, to the workers who administer them, said Branson, who researches and evaluates HIV tests. Those requirements — set by the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration — can be too expensive or difficult for some agencies to bear.

Saliva, unlike blood, does not pose a risk for HIV transmission, Branson said. That means the OSHA rules for saliva handling are much less restrictive and costly.

"There are a lot of things you don't need to do" with saliva tests, he said. "You can now use these oral fluid tests without incurring all those extra implications and expenses."

The approval also establishes OraQuick as a key tool for AIDS work in developing countries. It will allow missionaries, Peace Corps volunteers and other aid workers with limited medical training to diagnose AIDS in the field.

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