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Health

Fast Saliva Test for H.I.V. Gains Federal Approval

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The Food and Drug Administration approved yesterday the first H.I.V. test that uses saliva rather than blood and delivers results in 20 minutes.

Public health officials hope the new test will encourage wider and more frequent testing. About 25 percent of all Americans carrying H.I.V., the virus that causes AIDS, do not know that they are infected, according to estimates by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Around the world, according to the World Health Organization, that figure may be as high as 95 percent.

Although the test is as easy to use as a home-pregnancy kit and could eventually revolutionize H.I.V. testing, the company, OraSure Technologies of Bethlehem, Pa., is not yet seeking the right to sell it over the counter.

The test, the OraQuick H.I.V.-1/2 Test, is more than 99 percent accurate, said Michael Gausling, OraSure's president, and offers "more dignity, greater ease and no risk of transmission."

Tommy G. Thompson, the secretary of health and human services, announced the approval in a news conference yesterday in Washington along with the officials from the company, the drug agency and the C.D.C. Mr. Thompson called the test "another important option for people who might be afraid of a blood test."

Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and a prominent AIDS researcher called the test "a very good thing."

"It's extraordinary how many people don't come back for follow-up when they have to wait two weeks," Dr. Fauci said.

Typical H.I.V. tests require a vial of blood and are sent to a laboratory that returns results in 2 to 14 days. Two years ago, the drug agency approved an OraSure test that

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