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There are a whole bunch of nasal antiviral prophylactic sprays on the market. By and large they work in vitro; they aren't frauds, and they are safe to use. But there's a huge difference between laboratories tests that suggest it should reduce infections and testing in the field to see if it really does. So far, Taffix is the only one on which there is that kind of real-world data.

The reason it isn't approved in the US has nothing to do with either its safety nor efficacy, but with international regulations on importing medical devices (sufficiently messy stuff that I will not claim to begin to understand it). For me, being approved in the EU is good enough, and I don't mind having to buy from an international source. I can understand other people who might be reluctant.

I have no intention of naming my experts nor listing their credentials. It would NOT be appropriate. These are personal relationships—one of them is one of my partners, and the other one is her ex. They are not part of the public discourse, and they have a right to maintain their privacy.

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Posted by: ctein | Sunday, 24 March 2024 at 06:45 PM

Thank you, Ctein, for a well-thought-out and comprehensive article on the reality of living in the current COVID-19 climate. Disregard those captured by the political ("paranoid" this was not; it was spot on). I know you will :-)

My partner and I always mask in enclosed public spaces. We ask our friends to test before any gathering at our house, allowing us the peace of mind to hold mask-free gatherings. We can eat, drink, talk, and generally enjoy each other's company with reduced fear of spreading infection. This protocol catches at least one case of COVID every other month, a friend who didn't know they were infected and would have attended otherwise.

As the very fortunate recipient of a LAMP tester[^1] from my employer, I know the peace of mind from having quality testing at hand. Since the end of major restrictions, my LAMP test kits are no longer subsidized. At ~$50/test, we hoard those tests for specific occasions when the timeline and accuracy requirements necessitate a LAMP result. I'm going to look into the Metrix setup because it sounds like it is half the price. Thank you for that.

Since we no longer have subsidized LAMP tests, we buy our rapid antigen tests in bulk. We've generally been able to buy antigen tests for about $5/test[^2], sometimes as low as $4/test. It's also not cheap as a one-time purchase, but the costs of ending up with Long COVID or worse are far greater.

Like you, Ctein, we have been lucky so far. While we also know that it's probably inevitable, we want to keep it as far in the future as we can. And we also know that the studies on repeat infection show higher liklihood of Long COVID, so even if we eventually contract the disease, we want to do so as few times as possible.

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[^1]: https://cuehealth.com/covid-19-category
[^2]: https://cliawaived.com/flowflex-covid-19-antigen-home-test-50-test-pack.html

Posted by: Joel Becker | Sunday, 24 March 2024 at 07:38 PM

An expert is the first idiot, because he knows nothing outside of his field of study. Usually medically trained people do not study common sense.

Posted by: Bob Villa | Monday, 25 March 2024 at 08:41 AM

Dear Louis,

1) How do you know I'm unqualified? I needed to get so good at the epidemiology in the first year that I got to the point of being able to *quantitatively* calculate the risk of infection from a given activity during 2020.

2) Regardless of (1), what information did you find inaccurate in my posts? I would really like to know.

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Dear Bob,

Oh, yes!

Well... not that they know NOTHING, but their expertise in one area makes them prone to overrate their abilities in others. Best known example: Pons and Fleischmann's claims of cold fusion. They were great electrochemists, but incompetent at running physics experiments. They're not alone, sad to say.

At it happens, my pet epidemiology/biomedical people are huge polymaths... which means they know better than to step outside their areas of expertise. It's kinda "The more you know, the more you know what you don't know." Fortunately for me, they've been on Covid since Day 1. One of them was devising mass testing protocols back in Year 1, how to use clever maths to radically reduce the number of tests you needed to fully screen a large population, back when tests were in scarce supply.

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Posted by: ctein | Monday, 25 March 2024 at 04:04 PM

An addendum, because life is filled with irony...

Several days after I'd sent Mike this column, I was expecting to leave for a two week vacation in Minneapolis. After packing and checking in online I ran a Metrix test, a routine precaution so that I didn't become a "Covid Ctein" (more alliterative than "Typhoid Mary").

I included Paula in the run because, why not, when two can test as cheaply as one?

Half an hour later the red (positive for Covid) light came on. Huh.

I started a solo test because it was most likely I'd contracted Covid, seeing as I have far more contact with the outside world than Paula. After another half an hour the green light came on. I was infection–free.

Double huh.

A third test, this time Paula—maybe the first was one of those rare false positives (it happens like 0.1% of the time).

Red. It was Paula, not I, who had Covid!

I didn't dare go to MN, too much chance I'd gotten infected by her (statistically, less than 1 in 3, but still...). Paula and I started the isolation procedures we'd planned.

Friday morning I took another Metrix test. This time, red. C'est la vie (or c'est le Covid dix-neuf, I suppose)!

We're both on Paxlovid. Paula has almost unnoticeable symptoms (on Day 7-9) and I'm entirely asymptomatic (on Day 4-6). Were it not for Metrix, we'd not have known we were sick... and I'd have been carrying an infection to my friends and partners to Minneapolis.

For the heck of it we've both taken several antigen tests. They all come up negative, demonstrating how it is not a reliable indicator in very mild cases.

How often is it that you get to be your own after-publication anecdote?!

If it weren't for for the honor of it all...

Posted by: ctein | Monday, 25 March 2024 at 05:18 PM

Bob: You have a jaundiced view of physicians and scientists. I have personally known, and also met casually, scientists and physicians who were Nobel Laureates, and others in the field who were very informed and accomplished amateur artists, historians, musicians and even photographers. Scientists are people, with all of the virtues and faults of anyone else, who basically pursue a logic based on the what is known about a subject and how to apply that knowledge (which, by the way, is a paraphrase of the definition of "common sense").

Posted by: Rick in CO | Tuesday, 26 March 2024 at 03:14 PM

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