



Northwestern University Case Study

COVID-19 rapid self-testing program with Abbott BinaxNOW COVID-19 Antigen Self Test Kits

In the spring of 2021, Northwestern University launched a university-wide COVID-19 rapid self-testing program for students, faculty, staff and contract employees to supplement its on-campus testing program in which rapid antigen tests were administered by professionals. The university supplemented this mandatory testing program by providing participants with free BinaxNOW COVID-19 Antigen Self Test kits, allowing them to test as frequently as they wanted and know their COVID-19 status without leaving home. Participants found the self-tests easy to use and convenient, and that testing gave them confidence as many began resuming in-person activities. Many participants reported being grateful that they had test kits on hand after symptoms arose with their loved ones or after being exposed to someone with COVID-19. Program leads were able to expand the reach of testing efforts to include those who may not have been a part of the school’s mandated in-person testing program. The school will continue offering BinaxNOW COVID-19 Antigen Self Tests as students, faculty and staff return to campus in the fall of 2021.

“Supplementing our mandatory in-person testing program with BinaxNOW Self Tests has provided an additional level of assurance to our students, faculty and staff. We set out to make the testing kits as easily accessible and convenient as possible, and based on the continued interest and positive feedback, we are thrilled that our community appreciates this incremental tool in our tool kit. Adding these tests to our portfolio of offerings not only increased the safety of our community, but it also helped increase the confidence and comfort with returning to class and work on campus.”

– Renee Cherubin, Executive Director of COVID-19 and Operations

An outline of this program is highlighted below to help understand the setup, considerations and learnings associated with a COVID-19 rapid self-testing program for universities.

Program Overview

SIZE	PROGRAM	INSIGHTS
All university faculty, staff, students and contract employees have access to the program. 241,000 total tests have been distributed to date.	Provide Northwestern University faculty, staff, students and contract employees with COVID-19 rapid antigen self-tests to support the health of the Northwestern community and control the spread of COVID-19 across its campuses nationwide.	Many participants told the COVID-19 testing operations team that they found the tests easy to use, appreciated that they made COVID-19 testing more accessible and that results were delivered quickly. The program expanded testing beyond the mandatory in-person professional-use program that was ongoing at the school, allowing people access to at-home tests to use based on individual situations and comfort levels.

Key Themes and Insight

1. Program set-up

- Northwestern University added a COVID-19 rapid self-test program in May 2021 using BinaxNOW COVID-19 BinaxNOW Self Tests to increase access to testing beyond their current in-person testing program.



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- Participation in the program was voluntary and intended to reach faculty, staff, students and contract employees who are not regularly on campus or off campus during testing hours.
 - Prior to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance changing for vaccinated asymptomatic individuals, Northwestern University had a mandatory testing program for students using Abbott BinaxNOW COVID-19 Ag Card professional tests, which are administered by trained professionals.
 - Unvaccinated asymptomatic faculty, staff and students continue to be tested frequently using the Abbott BinaxNOW COVID-19 Ag Card professional tests, and vaccinated individuals are welcome to test as often as they would like.
 - The self-test program is intended to reach these audiences while also providing the entire Northwestern community with an opportunity to test themselves, family or close contacts from their homes, helping control the spread of COVID-19 on and around campus.
 - Self-testing helps provide people peace of mind, even when off campus, and a flexible option based on their level of concern. The university recognized that some people will use tests regularly, while others will use them in certain situations, and that the option to test was important in making the campus and community feel confident as they resume in-person activities.

2. Test distribution

- The BinaxNOW COVID-19 Antigen Self Test kits were first distributed in mass around the end of Spring Term and Commencement, as students were returning home. Distribution has steadily expanded throughout the summer of 2021.
- All Northwestern faculty, staff, students and contract employees are eligible to participate:
 - Participants pick up complementary rapid COVID-19 antigen self-test kits at the university's main testing centers.
 - Test kits were also distributed throughout university departments, such as academic schools, athletics and extracurricular organizations.
 - Kits are put in packaging to make them as convenient as possible to pick up, including a tape handle to make them easy to carry across campus.
 - Participants generally receive about 12 test kits at one time.
- Participants are encouraged to test as often as they like so the community's health is prioritized.

3. Results and impact

- Northwestern currently has a system in place to track the distribution of the tests, including those who have picked up multiple test kits over time. The school also routinely collects qualitative feedback from participants.
- The school does not require participants to report BinaxNOW COVID-19 Antigen Self Test kit results.
 - If participants test positive, they are instructed to quarantine, update their health status using their symptom tracking app, and follow up with a healthcare provider.
 - Participants who test positive using the BinaxNOW COVID-19 Antigen Self Test kit are additionally required to obtain a confirmatory test administered by a professional.
 - Northwestern also has a robust case management team available to support individuals that test positive, including helping connect them to a health care provider, contact tracing, monitor symptoms and arrange isolation housing, if necessary.
- Since the initial distribution of tests in May 2021, Northwestern has broadened its outreach by partnering with individual departments to supplement Return To Campus plans and provide this safety measure directly to faculty and staff as they begin returning to campus this fall.
 - Since May 25, Northwestern has distributed more than 241,000 test kits (155,000 through pick-up sites around campus and 86,000 directly to departments).



“I was able to use the BinaxNOW Self Tests I received at Northwestern to quickly and easily test my family after my children had been exposed. Continuing to regularly test myself allowed me to return to work on campus with peace of mind knowing that I wouldn’t transmit the virus to others.”

– Noel Davis, Northwestern University

4. Lessons Learned

- Northwestern developed a distribution plan that was both accessible and ensured tests got to a wide group of people with ease. Overall, the university found the combination of centralized testing distribution sites, delivery service, and good communication with department leads helped to foster greater equity in accessibility and participation.
 - The university leveraged existing staff to deliver test kits to individual units and departments for added convenience and accessibility.
 - To increase visibility, satellite locations in high traffic locations across campus were also utilized for immediate pick-up.
- Since adding the Abbott BinaxNOW COVID-19 Antigen Self Test to their portfolio, Northwestern University has seen a continued interest in the program and received positive feedback from department leads, faculty, staff and students that indicate adding the OTC tests as a supplement testing option has given the community more confidence as they return to work and learning in an in-person environment.