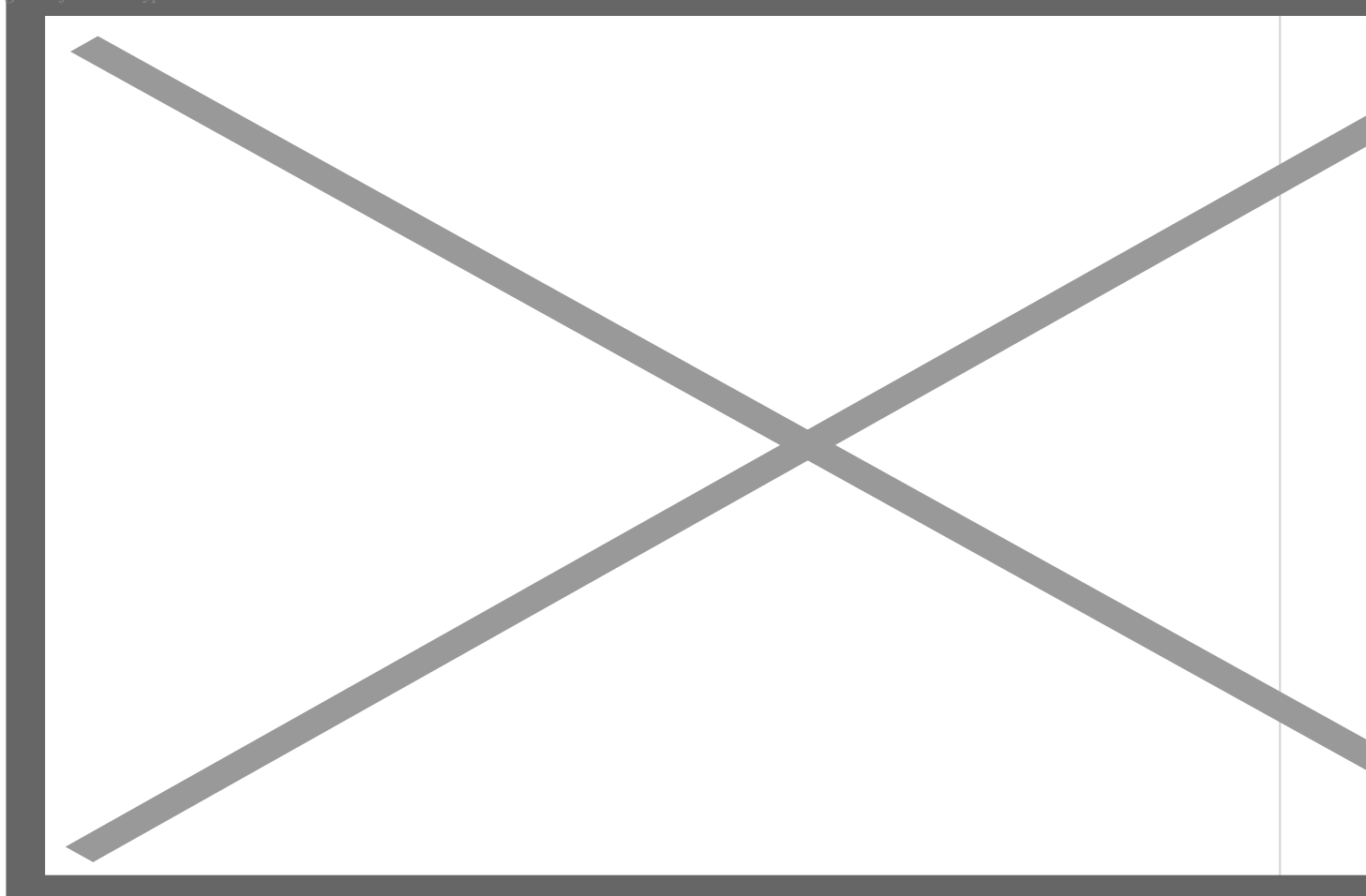


Rapid COVID-19 tests in U.S. becoming scarce and more expensive

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Surging demand for COVID-19 tests from US employers has exacerbated a nationwide shortage of rapid tests the U.S.

New York, October 6 (RHC)-- Surging demand for COVID-19 tests from US employers has exacerbated a nationwide shortage of rapid tests in recent weeks and is driving up costs for state and local testing programs, according to industry executives and state officials.

Testmakers including Abbott Laboratories (ABT.N), Quidel Corp (QDEL.O) and LumiraDX Ltd (LMDX.O) are scaling up production to meet rising demand. But significantly boosting test output will take weeks to months, half a dozen industry executives told Reuters, making the tests harder to procure in the near term.

"Employer demand has gone crazy," said Quidel Chief Executive Doug Bryant. "We won't be able to meet all the requests that we're having." Nearly a dozen state governments said they are grappling with shortages of rapid tests, which provide on-the-spot results within minutes and are crucial for COVID-19 surveillance programs.

In the U.S. state of Missouri, limited supplies of Abbott's Binax Now rapid test, which typically sell to states for around \$5 each, have forced it to consider other, more expensive options, a spokesperson for the states' public health agency said.

"We are exploring other rapid antigen tests and finding most are at least three times higher than Abbott's rapid antigen test," the spokesperson said, adding that Missouri has not yet had to purchase the pricier tests.

Oklahoma has begun to pay higher prices for tests in recent weeks, said Michael DeRemer, the state's director of emergency preparedness and response services.

State governments have been struggling to acquire enough rapid tests for several months after a surge in COVID-19 cases fueled by the more contagious Delta variant.

And U.S. employers in recent weeks have been rushing to stockpile tests after the White House in September said it plans to mandate weekly testing for unvaccinated staff at businesses with more than 100 employees.

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