Roche rolling out high-volume rapid Covid-19 test by year-end

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Swiss pharmaceuticals giant Roche said Tuesday it would produce a new antigen test for Covid-19, allowing high-volume and rapid testing for the deadly disease, by the end of the year.

The new Elecsys SARS-CoV-2 Antigen test is meant to be administered by healthcare professionals in a lab setting and allows the detection of the virus that causes Covid-19 in as little as 18 minutes, Roche said.

It said the "highly accurate" tests could be run through all so-called Cobas analysing equipment that is available in most labs, and that a single such machine could analyse up to 300 tests per hour.

"Being able to quickly and correctly identify if someone has a SARS-CoV-2 infection is critical to informing patient management decisions and containing the spread of Covid-19," Thomas Schinecker, who heads Roche's diagnostics unit, said in a statement.

The new coronavirus has killed nearly 1.1 million people and infected more than 37.5 million worldwide since it first surfaced in China late last year.

Roche said its test would first be available for countries that recognise the CE mark for products sold in the European Union, adding that it was also seeking approval from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Antigen tests are typically less sensitive than the more traditional PCR diagnostic test to low levels of virus.

Roche has already launched eight Covid-19 tests since the start of the crisis, including one that can distinguish between Covid-19 and the flu.

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