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‘NEW LIFE’

Cincinnati’s \$500,000 pickleball courts near completion

Scott Wartman Cincinnati Enquirer | USA TODAY NETWORK

It was one of the more unusual requests during the pandemic in Cincinnati.

When then-Cincinnati City Councilman David Mann asked residents in an online survey what they want the city to spend stimulus money on, 185 people flooded his inbox with the same request: They wanted more pickleball.

The persistence of the pickleball players will pay off in the next few weeks when the newly refurbished Sawyer Point pickleball and tennis courts open.

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ABOVE: Chris Strammer spreads a fresh coating on the Sawyer Point park court on July 19. DAVID KLENK/THE ENQUIRER

TOP: The pickleball courts at Sawyer Point are being renovated. ALBERT CESARE/THE ENQUIRER

“They’re so glad to get back. It’ll be like the grand opening of the baseball stadium, or when Paul Brown Stadium opened. It will be a lot of excitement.”

Al Bocklet 81-year-old pickleball player from Mount Lookout

COVID-19

Is my at-home test still good?

Brooks Sutherland
Cincinnati Enquirer
USA TODAY NETWORK

COVID-19 has crept back into southwest Ohio and northern Kentucky as two omicron subvariants have become the predominant strain of infection locally. But if you’re looking to shake the dust off of your at-home rapid antigen tests to use before a late-summer vacation or a visit to grandma, there are some factors to consider.

The first is effectiveness. Though studies regarding the accuracy of at-home tests were performed specifically on previous variants, experts say the sensitivity on the tests should be enough to pick up on BA.4 and BA.5, two highly infectious omicron subvariants currently spreading throughout Ohio and the Cincinnati region.

A study of the effectiveness of BinaxNow, a commonly used at-home rapid antigen test, found that the BinaxNow test accurately registered a positive result in 95% of samples that were also found positive by a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test.

“What we don’t know is, is this as good with the BA.4, BA.5 omicron as with BA.1 and BA.2?” said Dr. Stephen Feagins, chief clinical officer of Mercy Health Cincinnati. “This is just the best that we know. We think even with BA.4, BA.5, that 95% is probably somewhere similar.”

The tests, if used within proper expiration dates, will provide accurate results regardless of variant, said Amanda Carter, a spokeswoman for Hamilton County Public Health. The department recommends continuing to utilize the tests for a number of situations you might find yourself in as cases and hospitalizations rise.

“Any time you can take an additional step to mitigate the spread, whether it’s taking a proactive test before you see someone who’s high risk, whether

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The Cincinnati Enquirer



At-home test

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you're coming from a county that has high community spread, we recommend tests for anyone who wants to be cautious and take prevention steps," Carter said.

FDA extends expiration dates

Expiration dates are an important second factor. Though you may have a test at home that appears to have expired, you'll want to check the extended expiration dates issued in May. The date printed on the box could be the wrong expiration date, given the extensions.

The shelf life of the following at-home tests have been extended by the FDA.

- BinaxNow AG Card Home Test (extended from 12 to 15 months).
- BinaxNow Antigen Self Test (extended from 12 to 15 months).
- CareStart Antigen Home Test (extended from 9 to 12 months).
- Flowflex Antigen Home Test (extended from 12 to 16 months).
- Celltrion DiaTrust AG Home Test (extended from 12 to 18 months).
- Detect COVID-19 Test (extended from 6 to 8 months)
- iHealth Antigen Rapid Test (extended from 9 to 12 months).
- SCoV-2 Ag Detect Rapid Self Test (extended from 10 to 13 months).
- Pilot At-Home Test (extended from 6 to 9 months).

Expiration dates for these tests remain the same, according to the FDA.

- BD Veritor At-Home Test (6 months).
- Cue Test for Home and Over the Counter (4 months).
- Ellume Home Test (12 months).
- Genabio Rapid Self Test Kit (18

months).

- Lucira Check-It Test Kit (6 months).
- MaximBio ClearDetect Antigen Home Test (6 months).
- Inteliswab Rapid Test (9 months).
- OHC Antigen Self Test (8 months).
- Indicaid Rapid Antigen At-Home Test (12 months).
- QuickView At-Home Test (12 months).
- Clinitest Rapid Antigen Self Test (11 months).
- Speedy Swab Rapid Antigen Self Test (6 months).
- Rapid Antigen Test Card (6 months).

The FDA recommends ditching tests that have expired beyond the extension dates. The risks are that the tests can become dried out and over time and won't give an accurate test result.

"Anytime beyond the extended period, is time to get a new test," Carter said.

Feagins agreed, noting that it makes sense to have peace of mind given the availability of at-home testing.

"After doing the research and checking the actual expiration date and realizing that it has passed even the extended expiration date, there's a ton of these tests out there, go ahead and get a new one," he said.

Underreported testing

Last Thursday, the Cincinnati region's community risk level was upgraded to "high," triggering an indoor mask recommendation by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. An accurate picture of how much community spread exists however has become much more challenging since widespread use of at-home tests began.

As more individuals utilize at-home testing, officials worry many of the results go unreported and an accurate tabulation of community spread is unat-

tainable.

At a COVID-19 press briefing in May, Dr. Ashish Jha, the federal COVID-19 response coordinator described the challenge the tests have presented.

"Home tests are great, by the way," Jha said. "I've been a huge fan of home tests for the last two years. But what that means is we're clearly undercounting infections — undercounting cases."

Instead of using the number of cases as a reliable figure, many communities now turn to trends in hospitalizations.

Though intensive care unit beds filled with COVID patients remains low locally, the Cincinnati region has seen an increase in hospitalizations since the beginning of the month. As of last Thursday, there were 197 COVID patients hospitalized in the region, a number that rose by nearly 80 patients in two weeks, according to the Health Collaborative's Situational Dashboard. The region's medical surgical beds are 97% full, while ICU beds are 93% occupied, according to the latest data.

The upgrade to high community level, which is determined by looking at hospital beds being used, hospital admissions, and the total number of new COVID-19 cases in an area, recommends a number of preventative steps.

- Wear a well-fitting mask indoors in public, regardless of vaccination status (including in K-12 schools and other indoor community settings).

- If you are immunocompromised or high risk for severe disease: Wear a mask or respirator that provides you with greater protection; Consider avoiding non-essential indoor activities in public where you could be exposed; Talk to your healthcare provider about whether you need to take other precautions (e.g., testing); Have a plan for rapid testing if needed (e.g., having home tests or access to testing); Talk to your healthcare provider about whether you are a candidate for treatments like oral

antivirals, PrEP, and monoclonal antibodies.

- If you have household or social contact with someone at high risk for severe disease: consider self-testing to detect infection before contact; consider wearing a mask when indoors with them.

- Stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccines and boosters.

- Maintain improved ventilation throughout indoor spaces when possible.

- Follow CDC recommendations for isolation and quarantine, including getting tested if you are exposed to COVID-19 or have symptoms of COVID-19.

In-person tests can be arranged by visiting the Health Collaborative's Test and Protect Cincy website, where you can find a schedule and information about appointments.

To help agencies get a better understanding of community spread, local health departments have asked individuals who do utilize at-home tests, to self report positive tests. Some tests given through a doctor, clinic, or health department are proctored, meaning a staffer watches the test be administered and the result through a smart phone or app. But at-home tests purchased at a store or obtained by the government aren't proctored. If you take an at-home test and receive a positive result, here is how you can report it to your local jurisdiction.

Hamilton County Public Health isn't tracking results of at-home COVID-19 tests. If you are located in the city limits of Cincinnati, the Cincinnati Health Department has three options for self-reporting: visiting the department's designated online questionnaire through a browser, scanning the QR code to get to the questionnaire, or by calling in results to 513-357-7462.

Individuals not located in Cincinnati can report their result to their doctor, Carter said.

Courts

Continued from Page 1A

The game that's a hybrid between ping pong and tennis is considered by The Economist and other publications to be the fastest-growing sport in the nation. The number of Americans playing the game has grown by 11.5% each year for the past five years to more than 4.8 million players, according to USA Pickleball.

That's why pickleball players say the sport is worth the investment for Cincinnati. "It'll be a madhouse. There'll be so many people with so much energy," said Al Bocklet, an 81-year-old pickleball player from Mount Lookout. Every day he gets up at 6 a.m. and drives to the pickleball courts. Often, he's the one that opens the gates to play. The courts have been closed since May 15 as they're being remade.

"They're so glad to get back. It'll be like the grand opening of the baseball stadium, or when Paul Brown Stadium opened. It will be a lot of excitement."

Pickleball brings 'new life'

It cost the city \$509,000 to resurface and renovate courts into a pickleball palace, according to a cost breakdown from Cincinnati Parks. Most of it — \$428,000 — went to asphalt and the state-of-the-art, seven-layer shock absorption surface currently being laid down on the courts.

When it reopens, the tennis courts that have been there since the 1980s will

be 12 permanent pickleball-only courts and four remaining tennis courts. An additional 10 pickleball courts will be overlaid on three of the tennis courts.

The money came out of Cincinnati's budget for capital projects, according to Cincinnati Parks. No stimulus money was used. Three players also donated a total of \$70,000 to install the new lights and put in a new sound system.

What are the city and players getting for their money? A world-class pickleball facility, said Gary Lessis, a 61-year-old retired tech salesman who has led the efforts to turn Sawyer Point's tennis courts into a pickleball destination. He's done his research. Ask him about the economics and logistics of pickleball, and he has a spreadsheet or study ready at hand.

Since he started the Pickleball at Sawyer Point group in May 2020, it's grown to more than 2,200 members. On any given day, the courts have dozens of pickleballers. "The amount of people, it was basically a dead zone in that part of the park," Lessis said. "Now it's brought new life to that area."

The pickleball courts haven't drawn much opposition. The Cincinnati Park Board passed the funding unanimously in December 2021.

Is it a 'luxury'?

There will likely be some people who question the spending, said Evan Holt, an affordable housing advocate who ran for city council.

"Those concerns and frustrations are valid completely," said Holt, 34, of North Avondale.

Holt said he initially balked when he saw the \$500,000 price tag for the pickleball courts. But he doesn't assume the courts are taking money away from other projects. He said there should be enough resources to do both the pickleball courts and spend more on affordable housing.

"That's a luxury," Holt said of the pickleball courts. "I feel like our city overwhelmingly spends so much more money on luxuries that are nice for either tourists or people who are already comfortable and not on necessities for people who live and work here."

The way Lessis and other players see it, Cincinnati will only gain by investing in pickleball. They already have plans for a large tournament in October, Lessis said. He also expects the Association of Pickleball Professionals (APP) tour could soon announce a professional pickleball tournament for next year at Sawyer Point.

Pickleball exec: Venue is 'amazing'

How big of a deal is that? Well, it just so happens Lessis has a study from the Cincinnati USA Convention and Visitors' Bureau. The study calculated the APP tour event could generate \$2 million to \$3 million in additional spending at local businesses for a four-day event in May 2023.

The tournament is on the APP schedule for May 2023 and just needs a few more details to be ironed out, said Ken Herrmann, creative founder and chief executive officer of the APP. It will be one of 10 "golden ticket" events for players to qualify for the national champi-

onship in Indian Wells, California.

The facility and surroundings at Sawyer Point impressed Herrmann when he visited in May. Herrmann said it will be the premier facility in the Midwest for pickleball. There are few facilities in Midwest cities, he said.

"That's the struggle we're having in the Midwest," Herrmann said. "There are not large, dedicated pickleball facilities. Cincinnati being the first city to commit to developing a large venue like this is amazing."

In addition to the new courts, the bathrooms were renovated with new sinks and faucets and an office underneath the concrete grandstands received a new paint job and decor.

The pickleball players have also started an endowment to raise money for the upkeep of the courts. They've raised more than \$100,000 but used some of that for the renovations. The goal is to raise \$500,000, Lessis said.

A grand opening date has been set for Aug. 12, Lessis said. The courts will have a soft opening sometime before that depending on weather and when the work can get done. But the last week of July or first week of August seems likely, he said. The players are starting to make plans. Bocklet had a vacation planned for Florida that he may delay so he can be there on the first day.

"I want to be down there for the first day," Bocklet said. "It will be so exciting to get back with all the people we were playing with the last couple of years and to be on courts that will be that nice, all new nets, no cracks, shade. It'll be a real experience getting back to Sawyer Point."

TAKIYAH OWENS
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CINCINNATI, OH 45238

ORDER

In accordance with Chapter 119 of the Ohio Revised Code, on May 5, 2022, the Superintendent of Insurance issued an order revoking the Ohio insurance agent's licenses of TAKIYAH OWENS ("OWENS"), NPN 15961942. A copy of the order, which includes appeal rights, may be obtained from the Ohio Department of Insurance website (www.insurance.ohio.gov), or from Joshua Monroe, Ohio Department of Insurance, 50 W. Town St., 3rd Floor, Suite 300, Columbus, Ohio 43215. This order was originally mailed to OWENS'S last known address. An appeal must be filed on or before August 17, 2022.

Joshua Monroe
Enforcement/Licensing Attorney

Dated at Columbus,
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