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Book Club

Reviews and recommendations from critic Ron Charles.



By [Ron Charles](#)



(Photo by Ron Charles/The Washington Post)

Read any good Covid tests lately? If you live in Ohio, your public librarian can help out. An innovative program funded by the Ohio Department of Health is offering Abbott BinaxNOW home covid tests *for free* through the state's libraries. In August, 246 library locations gave away more than 53,000 tests.

This sounds incredible to me. (I've paid about \$24 a piece for Abbott BinaxNOW test kits at CVS.) The program has the enthusiastic support of Republican Gov. Mike

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DeWine. (Delaware and D.C. have similar programs with their public library systems.)

Mission creep? For Ohio Library Council executive director Michelle Francis, distributing covid tests is nothing out of the ordinary. “This is just someone checking something out,” she tells me. “The only thing is they’re not returning it.” The program reflects how broadly librarians interpret their role. “Libraries do so much more than books,” Francis says. “Yes, books are still extremely important, and literacy is at the core of what we do, but we are prepared to be the center of the community.” ([Are at-home covid tests accurate?](#))

Ohio librarians have been hearing from teens who want to go on college visits, musicians who want to get together to play, actors who want to go to auditions, family members who want to visit relatives undergoing cancer treatment — all kinds of people who need a negative covid test. “Our libraries, they’re doing what they do best: providing a community resource,” Francis says.

Using the library to distribute these home tests has all kinds of advantages over other methods. People may not have transportation to the local health department or even know where it is. And some are too afraid to ask for a test. “Well,” Francis says, “they’re not afraid to ask our libraries because they trust us.”