

The Sydney Morning Herald

Business Entrepreneurship [Coronavirus pandemic](#)

Ready in seconds: Sydney startup eyes rapid COVID test that uses mouthwash



By [Emma Koehn](#)

August 17, 2021 — 8.54am

For our free coronavirus pandemic coverage, [learn more here](#).

An Australian startup hoping to bring a rapid COVID-19 test to market that uses mouthwash says it's already seeing demand from school groups overseas as super-fast tests become key to reopening economies.

Medtech firm Inventive Health has entered a merger agreement with Israeli startup Virusight Diagnostic in hopes of bringing the SpectraLIT rapid test to market in Australia and overseas.



Inventive Healthcare is hoping to bring COVID-19 tester SpectraLIT to market.

The product uses mass spectrometry, a highly sensitive technique for measuring the mass of molecules, to analyse samples and identify COVID infections in seconds. The tool can analyse nasal swabs and the team is currently looking at the accuracy of using a non-invasive mouthwash to detect the presence of coronavirus.

“Rather than someone sticking [a swab] up your nose, you can wash it around your mouth and spit it in a test tube,” executive chairman of Inventive Health, former iSOFT chief executive Gary Cohen, said.

The merged company, to be known as Virusight Diagnostic, is one of several businesses across the world working on new rapid tests for the virus, despite Australia [having tough restrictions on the use of rapid tests](#), which generally must be evaluated by a healthcare professional.

Mr Cohen said while PCR tests would remain the “gold standard” for testing, there were opportunities for businesses offering new point-of-care options too.

“Rather than someone sticking [a swab] up your nose, you can wash it around your mouth and spit it in a test tube.”

Gary Cohen, executive chairman of Inventive Health and former iSOFT chief executive.

“It is not sustainable without rapid testing to be able to open up economies. The vaccine is one way to help, but you need to have a parallel support mechanism,” he said.

The company's SpectraLIT test has been registered in Europe and the company has begun approvals processes with the Therapeutic Goods Administration and the US Food and Drug Administration.

Asked about the challenges of getting approval for the tests, Mr Cohen said it was critical that point-of-care tests showed regulators that they could get strong and consistent results.

"You have to show this is clinically effective, and we believe genuinely believe it is," he said.

The TGA said last week that COVID-19 home tests were banned in Australia because a health practitioner should be overseeing them. "There is also a potential risk that some individuals could be motivated to conceal or not report a positive test, especially if they felt that their symptoms were mild and, for example, they might lose employment income," the regulator said in a question and answer section on its website.

Mr Cohen agreed that regulators had reservations about the use of rapid at-home tests because users were not always obligated to share their results.

"The problem I guess is in a pandemic where you are trying to ensure people do the right thing. You only need a few people to do the wrong thing and things get out of control," he said.

The SpectraLIT product is hoping to overcome this problem by linking up directly with contract tracing systems so that positive cases can be tracked as soon as they are detected.

"In many of the markets we're speaking to - France, England, other parts of Europe - everyone wants this for schools and education institutions. They [want] the ability to do rapid testing in those environments," Cohen said.

The Business Briefing newsletter delivers major stories, exclusive coverage and expert opinion. [Sign up to get it every weekday morning.](#)



Emma Koehn



Emma Koehn reports on healthcare companies for The Age and The Sydney Morning Herald. She is based in Melbourne.