

# Alaska increases lab reports received via electronic methods



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CATEGORY: **Epidemiology & Laboratory Capacity (ELC)**

CATEGORY: **Laboratory Data Exchange**

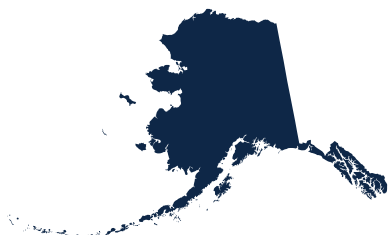
Alaska Division of Public Health implemented new and creative solutions to scale up electronic reporting methods during the pandemic, allowing for reports from critical industries and remote areas to be collected.

## The “What”

During COVID-19 response, Alaska increased its number of electronic laboratory reporting (ELR) sites from around 20 to over 2,000 and increased the percentage of lab reports received via electronic methods from around 75% to over 99.5%.

Because of the remote and rural nature of many Alaska communities and the need for accessible testing to protect residents and keep essential services open, Alaska Division of Public Health (DPH) partnered to set up electronic reporting with schools; mining, oil and gas, tourism and seafood industries; tribal corporations and village clinics; clinical care sites; city/ borough governments; and first responders.

They accomplished this by implementing new, creative solutions and scaling up existing electronic reporting methods. Non-traditional test sites such as these required innovative, flexible technical solutions and supportive DPH staff



to initiate, monitor and maintain electronic reporting. Results were routed electronically from locations in the Denali backcountry, the Bering Sea, the Aleutian Islands, at sea in Glacier Bay, and many more.

## The “So What”

Increasing electronic reporting dramatically reduced the proportion of results requiring manual data entry from faxed reports to less than one percent of all incoming results. This meant the unprecedented volume of incoming lab data and expectations of timely public data release could be managed. Positive results were quickly incorporated into the State’s COVID-19 case surveillance, and new positive cases were routed to contact tracing and included in daily case counts.

## The “Now What”

Because ELR had been established as a key surveillance mechanism in advance of the COVID-19 pandemic and was able to be scaled up, it proved an essential route to provide timely and actionable flow of lab results to DPH. However, even with some established pre-existing infrastructure, the investment of resources required to increase and maintain reporting to meet pandemic demands was substantial, and ongoing sustainable funding will be crucial to maintain the gains accomplished as a COVID-19 response measure.

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