

CDC gives nod to Alabama's efforts: State's COVID-19 messages now officially recognized



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In order to transmit COVID-19 case notifications to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) from their in-house developed case page, Alabama underwent a rigorous review and onboarding process. The successful approval to send routine COVID-19 notification messages to the CDC highlights the commitment to public health, resilience in adapting to changing circumstances, and the ability to meet the standards through continued trial and error.

The “What”

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Alabama took steps to create its own, state-developed webpage for COVID-19 maps. While many states opted to wait for the release of the COVID-19-specific page and message mapping guide provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Alabama decided to develop a state-specific page. In January 2021, the review of the first template began. The page included many local questions, and after review, the first of many recommendations was provided.



The initial stages were challenging, as Alabama encountered business rule issues and state-specific question logic errors, to name a few. These items would continue to trigger metadata issues during the Association of Public Health Libraries (APHL) review process along with required page updates, resulting in errors. Troubleshooting became a regular part of the review and doubts arose about the decision to onboard without utilizing the CDC-provided COVID-specific page, particularly considering the high volume of cases at that time. With the help of APHL, consistent troubleshooting, clear and concise communication, and plenty of patience became essential pieces of “The What” for Alabama.

In July 2022, Alabama's limited production messages were sent and confirmed. With hopes of proceeding, yet another set of issues was presented within the production environment. Alabama remained dedicated to its goal of implementing a page and providing reliable COVID-19 data. At the height of the review with the CDC, a geocoding issue surfaced affecting nearly 7,000 COVID-19 cases. This error warranted internal process updates and Alabama was able to correct 6,899 of those cases. Over the next nine months, the state would invest significant time and efforts, working closely with General Dynamics Information Technology, Inc. (GDIT), to pinpoint valuable processes that aligned with CDC guidelines to complete the full onboarding. On June 9, 2023, Alabama was officially approved to send routine COVID-19 case notifications to the CDC.



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The “So What”

Alabama’s efforts paid off as their state-developed page was approved to send routine COVID-19 notification messages to the CDC. Alabama demonstrated resilience and adaptability by tailoring its information platform to meet the provided requirements. The successful approval to send routine COVID-19 notification messages to the CDC highlights the commitment to public health, resilience in adapting to changing circumstances, and the ability to meet the standards through continued trial and error. This process was a learning experience and reflects the importance of accurate and timely reporting during a public health crisis.



The “Now What”

The two-year process improved Alabama’s data quality and has created a streamlined process to share nationally notifiable conditions as requested. Alabama’s success story may inspire others to seek innovative approaches in the face of health crises. Moving forward, Alabama’s approval to send messages enhances data sharing and collaboration, improves public health response availability, and

provides potential for replication and best practices. With the onboarding approval, Alabama now has the opportunity for knowledge exchange, quality data, and effective pandemic management. Alabama will continue to contribute to national efforts and shape future best practices in public health information sharing and response.