

# SHIN-NY COVID-19 Test Alerts: Critical Tool in the Fight

New York is slowly emerging from the worst public health crisis in modern history, where our healthcare system had to immediately transform, pivot, and stay prepared for whatever developments were ahead. When every moment counted, timely access to healthcare data has been key.

Across the state, **over 2 million alerts** about COVID-19 positive test results have been sent to providers between March and June. These alerts helped to inform the treatment and management of **almost 250,000 COVID-19 positive New Yorkers**. **Roughly 85%** of these alerts were delivered within the downstate region, the area hit hardest by the pandemic.

The demands on the health infrastructure were overwhelming. In parts of the state, hospitals overflowed with critical care patients, temporary alternate sites were created, there were no elective surgeries, doctors' physical offices were closed, testing and testing capacities were expanding to non-traditional venues. The state needed an efficient way to ensure providers in the community were aware of COVID-19 test results for their patients and that's when the SHIN-NY stepped in to help.



The Statewide Health Information Network for New York (SHIN-NY) is a largely publicly funded, connected network of regional health information organizations that offer certain core services to participating organizations to improve healthcare and reduce unnecessary costs. During this pandemic, the SHIN-NY supported healthcare providers and public health in several ways, one of which has been alerts about COVID-19 test results to a patient's physician and entire care team. By getting this information quickly, providers have been better able to manage patient care in the community, reduce inappropriate hospital visits helping to lower the surge, and protect healthcare staff and other patients to slow the spread.



Many laboratories are connected to the SHIN-NY; however, not all are — so the SHIN-NY partnered with NYS Department of Health (NYS DOH) to obtain comprehensive COVID-19 test data. As New Yorkers get tested for COVID-19, the results are added to the State's Electronic Clinical Laboratory Reporting System (ECLRS), and those results are shared with the SHIN-NY. This combined data ensures the network can send these important alerts out to participating providers and care teams.



Community providers — whether physicians, home health providers, clinics, or others caring for patients outside of facilities, have relationships with individual patients and their families. Most of patients with COVID-19 recover from the illness without needing special treatment including hospitalization. This means the majority of patients with the disease are dealing with it in the community, at home, under the care and treatment of their physician and other providers. A SHIN-NY COVID-19 test alert can prompt action such as viewing a patient's comprehensive clinical record available within the network to obtain more information and/or contacting the patient or caregiver for discussion and advisement.

Since COVID-19 is highly contagious, the SHIN-NY alerts have also been helping to reduce spread. After receiving an alert about a COVID-19 positive test from a regional health information organization in the SHIN-NY, a provider can use it to inform critical decisions. This was especially true in the beginning of the pandemic when there were shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE) and knowing when healthcare workers may have been exposed to COVID-19 positive patients and need to isolate was vitally important. These alerts will continue to support healthcare providers across the state, including physician offices and clinics as they re-open and need to adjust workflows, limit exposure, and continue to need comprehensive clinical information for their patients beyond the care they themselves have rendered, or tests they directly ordered.

New Yorkers are indeed “tough”. The heroism of our healthcare professionals and essential workers has been abundantly clear and compelling. The strong leadership of our State and local government officials has made the difference. The State had the foresight to create and fund the SHIN-NY partnership and public utility-type infrastructure which made these alerts possible.

As a potential second wave of COVID-19 looms, this alerts service can once again prove an extremely important component of pandemic response and management. Providers across the state should ensure they are participating with a regional health information organization and set up to receive these valuable notifications, a service available to them free of charge. The New York eHealth Collaborative (NYeC) and the entire network remain ready and available to provide support.

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*Our patients are often getting tested through drive through facilities or urgent care centers that don't provide medical provider assessment or followup care. These sites do not notify us of testing. Notification allows us to followup with the patient to ensure they've received treatment, education about worsening symptoms, and information about protecting themselves and others.*

*Additionally, we do not always receive notifications from EDs/hospitals that our patients have been seen for COVID. This notification allows us to identify patients in need of followup.*

**— Director of Integrated Substance Use Services  
at Brightpoint Health,  
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HealthConnections Participant**

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