

PANDEMIC RESPONSE LAB

Local Test Processing to Increase Safety and Economic Activity



The City's long-term strategy, *The Path to a Stronger, Healthier, and Fairer City*, places public health at the center of New York City's economic recovery. The strategy builds upon the City's successful efforts to respond to COVID-19 with significant new investments to cement our position as a global leader in public health innovation, attracting and growing high quality jobs and improving health outcomes in historically underinvested communities.



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As COVID-19 struck NYC this spring, it quickly became clear that laboratories across the United States were struggling to keep up with the number of tests required to monitor community health. While access to testing expanded quickly over the first months of the pandemic, the laboratories processing these tests couldn't keep pace, coming under increasing pressure for faster turnaround times for rising quantities of tests. By the summer, as cases surged across the country, processing turnaround times slowed to as long as two weeks.

THE NEED FOR AN NYC LAB

Frequent testing of all New Yorkers, even asymptomatic individuals, is imperative for health and safety, and for the reopening of our economy. As part of the City's test and trace efforts, community testing allows health officials to quickly identify new outbreaks of COVID-19.

As we enter the fall, it's not only the start of flu season, but also the reopening of schools and the continued reopening of businesses. Regular community testing remains key to keep people safe as activities increase and economic recovery begins. We need to ensure laboratories can process local test results as quickly as possible.

THE LAUNCH OF PRL

Earlier this summer, the City, through New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC), began the work to establish a lab to provide NYC-dedicated COVID-19 test processing. NYCEDC reached out for proposals from diagnostic companies, vetted these proposals with experts within two weeks, and, by the end of the month, the City made the decision to move forward with the Pandemic Response Lab (PRL, pronounced “pearl”). During July and August, NYCEDC worked closely with NYC Health + Hospitals (H+H) on the contract and various elements of execution.

On September 17, the Mayor announced the launch of PRL, a facility dedicated to processing COVID-19 tests within 24-48 hours for New Yorkers tested at H+H facilities. Based in the Alexandria Center for Life Science in Manhattan, the lab is now up and running, and will scale up its capacity to process approximately 20,000 tests per day by November. The City will pay \$28 for each test—significantly lower than what other laboratories are charging.

The effort to launch the lab was led by NYCEDC and used technology licensed from NYU Langone Health, based on research led by Dr. Jef Boeke, a geneticist and founding director of The Institute for Systems Genetics at NYU Langone. Brooklyn-based Opentrons, a robotics company focused on life sciences, also worked with diagnostic experts from P4 Clinical, Health + Hospitals, and the NYC Test + Trace team to launch PRL.

In addition to expanding the city’s lab capacity, PRL is providing New Yorkers with good-paying jobs—as clinical lab technologists, customer success representatives, automation engineers, and scientists, among others—by already employing close to 100 people. That number will climb to approximately 150 by November.

WHAT'S NEXT

As the need for testing across the country rises, PRL will build on existing capacity as part of the overall NYC testing strategy and provide faster results dedicated to serve the city.