Digital Bridge

Electronic health records hold tremendous promise for public health objectives. In theory, lab and case reporting, combined with test ordering and results, should make health data instantly (and securely) accessible by both providers and agencies.

However, practice has not lived up to theory. That’s sparked a massive collaboration of healthcare providers, health tech companies and public health agencies to form Digital Bridge. Their goal: harness the true potential of electronic health records to improve public health surveillance.

Patient data moving from healthcare providers to public health agencies is typically de-identified to ensure patient privacy. But agencies need contact and demographic information for any patients that test positively for COVID-19 to perform contact tracing and track the spread of the virus.

APHL has worked with CDC to update the Digital Bridge technology so case reports could move automatically to health agencies while keeping patient data secure. This process eliminates the need for epidemiologists to spend precious time tracking down patient data while helping public health agencies pinpoint the virus’s location and populations that are most at-risk.