

## Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene (WSLH) Wisconsin Wastewater Monitoring Project

### *Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)*

#### ***I. Project Overview***

##### ***1. What is wastewater?***

- Wastewater (also referred to as “sewage” or “influent” of a wastewater treatment facility) includes water from household building use (i.e., toilets, showers, sinks, laundry) that can contain human bodily excretions including fecal waste, as well as water from non-household sources (i.e., rainwater, business, and industrial use).

##### ***2. Why test wastewater?***

- Nearly 80 percent of United States households are served by municipal sewage collection systems.
- SARS-CoV-2 can be shed in the feces of individuals with symptomatic or asymptomatic infection; therefore, wastewater surveillance can capture data on both types of infection.
- Testing influent from a wastewater facility is an efficient way to obtain pooled community sample.
- SARS-CoV-2 detection in sewage serves as a COVID-19 indicator that is independent of healthcare-seeking behaviors and access to clinical testing.
- SARS-CoV-2 measurements in untreated wastewater can provide information on changes in total COVID-19 infection in the community contributing to that wastewater treatment plant (that area is known as the “sewershed”).
- Depending on the frequency of testing, sewage surveillance can be a leading indicator of changes in COVID-19 burden in a community.
- Data from wastewater testing is not meant to replace existing COVID-19 surveillance systems but rather to complement them.

##### ***3. What are the objectives of the wastewater monitoring project?***

- Overall goal of wastewater monitoring is to provide independent and complementary information to the traditional population testing for the Wisconsin health departments.
- Our key objective is to measure the amount of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19 in Wisconsin by measuring the amount of virus in untreated wastewater.
- We are also monitoring for other respiratory viruses such as influenza A & B (seasonal flu) and RSV (respiratory syncytial virus), and developing methods to track multidrug resistant organisms.
- We are monitoring novel variants, as well as variants of concern, by examining the genetic material of SARS-CoV-2 viruses.

#### **4. Where can the results be found?**

- Results are displayed on the state and national wastewater surveillance dashboards:
  - <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/wastewater.htm>
  - <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#wastewater-surveillance>
  - <https://dataportal.slh.wisc.edu/sc2dashboard>

#### **5. When will wastewater monitoring end?**

- The monitoring network in place for SARS-CoV-2 will run at least through the end of July 2024 but may be extended based on funding availability.

#### **6. Is SARS-CoV-2 in wastewater a risk to human health?**

- Our laboratory is not evaluating the infectivity of the **influent** samples. However, up to date scientific data strongly suggests that the SARS-CoV-2 virus in the influent is no longer infectious and therefore the health risk to wastewater operators is low. In addition, multiple labs have shown that the virus RNA is absent from WWTP **effluents**. Also according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Protection (CDC), no additional COVID-19-specific protections are recommended for workers involved in wastewater management, including those at wastewater treatment facilities. For more information please visit: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-IPC-WASH-2020.4>

## **II. Glossary**

- <http://www.slh.wisc.edu/environmental/covid-19-wastewater/>

**Have additional questions? Please feel free to contact the WSLH COVID Sewage Team at:**

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