

Wastewater surveillance for COVID-19 in South Australia

COVID-19 wastewater surveillance strategy in South Australia

A range of viruses (including the virus which causes COVID-19) may be present in wastewater from homes and businesses. Monitoring wastewater can identify the presence of non-infectious genetic material from viruses (viral RNA) to build a better understanding of virus transmission in South Australian communities.

Testing wastewater is a non-invasive way to track and monitor the prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 (the virus) at a large-scale. It provides an additional source of information to clinical testing (individuals being tested), which remains the focus of surveillance.

The results of testing inform additional surveillance strategies (such as increased clinical testing in certain areas) which forms part of the broader public health response to COVID-19 in South Australia.

Who is conducting wastewater surveillance in SA?

SA Health has joined forces with SA Water to identify possible COVID-19 cases in the community by analysing wastewater samples.

Currently, wastewater sampling is occurring at SA Water wastewater treatment plants at Bolivar, Christies Beach, Glenelg, Port Lincoln, Angaston and Mt Gambier. Further testing sites will be added throughout the surveillance project as required. South Australian Universities are also undertaking wastewater surveillance at various locations.

This work forms part of a broader national initiative called the ColoSSoS Project – Collaboration on Sewage Surveillance of SARS-CoV-2, coordinated by Water Research Australia.

Is COVID-19 transmitted through wastewater and recycled water?

There is currently no evidence to suggest that COVID-19 can be transmitted through wastewater and recycled water use. Detection of viral RNA does not necessarily indicate the presence of infectious or live virus. Based on the structure of the coronavirus, it is not expected to survive as long as other viruses in wastewater and is sensitive to treatment including chlorination.

Municipal sewerage services, Community Wastewater Management Systems and recycled water supplies are carefully managed by SA Water and Local Government to protect public health and the environment.

Recycled water can continue to be used with no additional restrictions on end uses. Additional precautions and measures are not required to deal with COVID-19 in wastewater and recycled water. However as standard practice it is advised that unnecessary contact with wastewater and recycled water should be avoided due to the general hazardous nature of wastewater.

Additional Information

SA Health: [COVID-19 Hygiene, water and sanitation fact sheet](#)

World Health Organization (WHO), Water, sanitation, hygiene and waste management for COVID-19, Technical Brief: www.who.int/publications-detail/water-sanitation-hygiene-and-waste-management-for-covid-19

Water Research Australia SARS-CoV-2 Water and Sanitation Factsheet: www.waterra.com.au/publications/factsheets

For more information

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