

# **Wastewater Surveillance**

# **Frequently Asked Questions**

## What is wastewater surveillance?

Wastewater surveillance is a community-level approach to sampling and testing raw wastewater for pathogens that enter sewer systems through human waste. Wastewater samples are taken before wastewater is treated. Samples are then processed to test for diseases that may be circulating in a community. Test results are analyzed to detect trends and inform public health action.

## How is wastewater surveillance beneficial to public health?

Wastewater surveillance can provide an early warning signal that disease is spreading in a community. Pathogens in wastewater can be shed by persons who may have no symptoms or before they develop symptoms. Public health agencies can then prompt community members to take extra precautions to help prevent illness for themselves and their families.

## What types of sites are participating in the program?

Municipal and regional wastewater treatment plants, as well as institutes of higher education currently participate in the NJDOH Wastewater Surveillance Program.

## Are areas that are not linked to city water systems represented in the program?

Testing is not conducted on dwellings or buildings that utilize a septic system. However, individuals that reside in areas serviced by septic systems may travel to locations for work or school and be represented in sample testing from participating locations.

## Can sites still enroll in the NJDOH Wastewater Surveillance Program?

Yes, sites interested in enrolling or receiving additional information can email the Wastewater Surveillance Team at <u>CDS.WWS@doh.nj.gov</u>.

#### How many times per week are samples tested?

Samples are collected and tested two times per week. Occasionally this cadence may change due to holidays or other circumstances.

#### Where are samples tested?

Samples are tested at New Jersey Public Health and Environmental Laboratories (PHEL).

#### How are wastewater samples processed and tested?

You can find information on how wastewater samples are processed and tested by visiting the <u>PHEL</u> <u>Wastewater Surveillance webpage</u> to learn more.

# Are NJDOH wastewater testing results posted publicly?

Yes, results are posted publicly while maintaining confidentiality of site names. You can find the results by navigating to:

For information on SARS-CoV2 levels in wastewater:

- CDC NWSS state trends: Click here
- CDC NWSS site-specific metrics: <u>Click here</u>

For information on Influenza A virus levels in wastewater: Click here

For information on Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) levels in wastewater: Click here

For information on Mpox levels in wastewater: Click here

# What does a detection in wastewater mean and how is that information used?

A positive wastewater detection means that illness-causing viruses or bacteria above set levels of detection thresholds were identified in samples tested from wastewater treatment plants. Information on positive detection is used as one tool, in conjunction with other tools including clinical and syndromic surveillance data, to complement and inform public health planning and response efforts.

# What does an influenza A(H5) detection in wastewater mean?

A positive influenza A(H5) detection in wastewater indicates that material entering a sewage system contains nucleic acids from an influenza virus with the H5 subtype (e.g., H5N1). The detection provides a signal that animals or humans may be infected with the virus. Wastewater data cannot determine the source of influenza A viruses and cannot tell us whether the viral detection came from animals, wild birds, an animal product (such as milk from an infected cow), or humans. Following a detection, public health officials and agriculture partners investigate to better understand what may be contributing to the detection and whether public health action is needed.

# Where can I get more information?

- The NJ Department of Health <u>https://www.nj.gov/cd/topics/wastewater.shtml</u>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <a href="https://www.cdc.gov/nwss/wastewater-surveillance.html">https://www.cdc.gov/nwss/wastewater-surveillance.html</a>

This information is intended for educational purposes only. Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.