

WA Media Release

New program to test wastewater for COVID-19

Friday, 18 September 2020

- Wastewater testing evaluation program for the COVID-19 virus to commence in Western Australia
- Wastewater testing may provide an early warning of COVID-19 prevalence in the community
- Additional measure to complement WA's COVID-19 preparedness

Western Australia's wastewater will soon be tested for the COVID-19 virus, with an evaluation program to expand PCR testing to the State's sewerage network.

The Collaboration on Sewage Surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 (ColoSSoS) Project will track and monitor for traces of the COVID-19 virus in WA's sewerage network.

It will be led by the WA Health system - with testing undertaken by PathWest - to provide an opportunity for robust evaluation and review of the role of wastewater surveillance for COVID-19 in Western Australia.

The Water Corporation and Water Research Australia are also project partners.

The evaluation will aim to answer questions such as what are the best sites to test, the testing frequency and interpreting the information.

Importantly, this program will be informed by public health data and knowledge to complement the State's public health follow-up.

Individual testing of people at COVID clinics and other collection facilities is the mainstay of detection for COVID-19.

Wastewater testing will enhance this testing as it samples a large proportion of the population with each test.

The Water Corporation began collecting samples from metropolitan wastewater treatment plants in April this year in readiness for testing, with PathWest currently validating the testing methods and preparing for regular testing.

Testing is expected to begin within the next month.

Comments attributed to Health Minister Roger Cook:

"Western Australia is in a unique position to undertake work in this field, given our current state of no community transmission for the past five months.

"Our priority has always been testing individuals to keep Western Australia safe but we've also been storing wastewater samples since April.

"Now that WA has had no community transmission for the past five months, we're ready to start wastewater testing as well.

"This will add yet another layer of both checks and reassurance.

"We have had a very considered and deliberate strategy along every step of this difficult COVID-19 journey.

"So this is yet another step of many in 2020.

"The results may also provide further data to help inform WA's COVID-19 restrictions."

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