

California Department of Public Health Wastewater Surveillance



California Wastewater Surveillance Network Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Who does wastewater surveillance in California?

Wastewater monitoring for SARS-CoV-2 is carried out by several groups, including the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) California Surveillance of Wastewaters (Cal-SuWers) Program. Other groups also monitor wastewater, with some contributing data to the California Wastewater Surveillance Network (CA WWS Network), managed by CDPH and with data used for state and local public health, and submitted to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Wastewater Surveillance System (NWSS).

Groups participating in wastewater monitoring in California include:

- Local health departments
- Wastewater utilities
- Academic programs
- Commercial laboratories
- CDC NWSS

California is a participating state in the CDC NWSS. CDPH Cal-SuWers Program sites are monitored by the CDPH Drinking Water and Radiation Lab (DWRL), which conducts sample testing in several counties across the state. Samples collected at these CDPH Cal-SuWers Program locations are tested for infectious disease pathogens including SARS-CoV-2, influenza (flu), and Mpox.

How large is the California WWS Network?

The CA WWS Network covers more than 60% of California's population with our combined network of contributing wastewater treatment plants (WWTPs).

To learn more, visit the [CDPH Wastewater Surveillance Network Dashboard](#).

Why is wastewater surveillance not done at every treatment plant in California?

California has hundreds of active WWTPs, but due to resource constraints at the utility, laboratory, and public health levels, we are unable to collect and test wastewater samples from all utilities in the state. However, we have enough WWTPs participating from throughout the state to be representative of most populations and regions to provide CDPH and local health jurisdictions with useful disease trends.



How can a wastewater utility get involved?

For counties or utilities interested in establishing a wastewater surveillance program on their own, email Cal-SuWers at wws@cdph.ca.gov.

How does the process of sample collection work?

Typically, the wastewater utility is responsible for collecting samples on-site, as they have the proper training, equipment, and access needed to collect raw wastewater samples safely. In some circumstances, partnership between local health departments and utilities can be formed to collect and ship samples to a testing lab.

How does the process of shipping specimens work?

In many cases, sample collection materials will be provided to participating wastewater utilities in advance. Sample collection kits often include all materials necessary to collect and prepare the samples to be shipped, including pre-paid shipping labels, collection tubes/bottles, sample labels, specimen bags, chain of custody forms, and ice packs to ensure samples remain cool during transportation. To ensure safety, samples should be shipped with appropriate biohazardous materials labeling and follow proper protocols provided by the receiving laboratory.

How is this being paid for?

The CDPH Cal-SuWers Program is primarily funded through the CDC Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity (ELC) fund. The cost of physically collecting the wastewater samples is covered either by the participating sanitation district on a voluntary basis or partially by the CDC ELC funds. Lab testing analysis is done at the CDPH DWRL, supported by this CDC ELC fund.

How long will the CDPH Cal-SuWers Program continue?

The CDC ELC funding is awarded annually on a five-year cycle. Current funding supports the continuation of wastewater surveillance through the summer of 2023. CDPH has applied for continuation of CDC ELC funding to continue the wastewater surveillance program and will reapply each year.

Where can I find the data?

Results from the California WWTPs participating in CDPH CA WW Network can be found on the [CDPH Surveillance of Wastewaters \(Cal-SuWers\) Network Dashboard](#).



Where do data on the Cal-SuWers Dashboard come from?

Laboratory results from the CDPH DWRL for WWTPs participating in the CDPH Cal-SuWers Program, and other partners, including but not limited to academic research groups, private labs, and the CDC commercial lab.

We have our own WWS and want to be part of the CA WWS Network, how can we submit our data to CDPH/CDC?

If you are interested in submitting your WWS data for inclusion in the CA WWS Network and dashboard, please refer to the CDC NWSS reporting requirements outlined in the data dictionary and email wws@cdph.ca.gov.

