

COVID-19 Monitoring Detects Elevated Levels of COVID-19 in Wastewater

News Release Date

06-22-2021

For Immediate Release

June 22, 2021

BEAUFORT, NC – In the past two weeks, testing through the North Carolina Wastewater Monitoring Network has found increasing levels of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID- 19, in wastewater from the Town of Beaufort. The wastewater treatment plant has been a COVID-19 monitoring facility since January 2021.

“As a proactive step in protecting our community, the Town agreed to participate in the statewide program,” said Beaufort Mayor Everette Newton. “We are one of 10 communities in North Carolina participating in this early warning detection program.”

This data serves as a reminder to stay vigilant as the virus is still a threat. The number of new COVID-19 cases reported in the Beaufort area has not increased recently, but fewer people are seeking testing statewide. The data is reflective of the population serviced by the Town of Beaufort’s sewer system.

Viral particles can be detected in wastewater before increases in case counts or hospitalizations. This means that monitoring wastewater at treatment plants can provide an early warning of disease increase in a community. However, results can be affected by temporary changes in the population.

Wastewater monitoring is a way to track the spread of COVID-19 in participating communities. People who are infected with COVID-19 shed viral particles in their feces. These viral particles are no longer infectious in wastewater but can be measured if enough people are infected.

Since January 2021, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services has been working with wastewater utilities, local public health departments and researchers at the University of North Carolina to look for SARS-CoV-2 in wastewater as part of the CDC’s National Wastewater Surveillance System. Currently, data are reported from 10 wastewater treatment facilities in North Carolina, including the Town of Beaufort, but the program is expanding to additional sites.

“The ability to track the SARS-CoV-2 virus in wastewater offers an important contribution to overall public health protection. This is because a high number of infected individuals

go untested, but all infected individuals, whether with or without symptoms, can transmit the virus to others,” said Rachel Noble, Professor at UNC Chapel Hill Institute of Marine Sciences.

Local health officials are urging all residents 12 and over who are not yet vaccinated to find a vaccine location near them. Safe and effective vaccines are widely available. Additionally, it is important for people who are not fully vaccinated to continue taking steps to prevent spread, including wearing a mask, practicing social distancing, and washing their hands frequently.

“This is an important reminder that COVID-19 is still here and still a risk for people who are not fully vaccinated,” said Nina Oliver, Carteret County health director. “COVID-19 vaccines are the best way to protect yourself and others.”

To find a vaccination location near you, please visit – <https://myspot.nc.gov/>.

To find a testing center if you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 or think you may have been exposed to COVID-19, please visit

To see the most recent data and more information about the NC Wastewater Monitoring Network, please visit – <https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/dashboard/wastewater-monitoring>. The latest findings will be released later this week via the above link.

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Supporting Documents

Wastewater Joint Press Release 618.49 KB