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CHW joins in national sewage tests

Melbourne Water

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BY **GREG GLIDDON**

CENTRAL Highlands Water has joined a national research project to test, track and monitor SARS-CoV-2, the virus which causes coronavirus, through the sewerage network.

A similar project conducted in The Netherlands has shown that sewage testing has the potential to detect coronavirus in the community, even before a person has been tested.

Weekly sewage samples are taken from regional wastewater treatment plants by CHW operators and sent to Melbourne for testing with the water authority providing 24 weeks of testing.

The genetic material of coronavirus, not the live virus, can be present in the sewage.

Testing sewage can identify and track coronavirus and help to inform the levels of the virus within the community.

CHW managing director Paul O'Donohue said the project could have major public health ramifications going forward.

"The results from this testing will be integrated with health data to guide the management of coronavirus and demonstrates the role water utilities can have in supporting our community through this pandemic," Mr O'Donohue said.

Melbourne Water and Barwon Water are also authorities involved in the project.

Melbourne Water chief scientist Melita Stevens said the surveillance of wastewater for the COVID-19 virus had the potential to inform disease control programs.

"This sampling could potentially identify emerging or re-emergent outbreaks, better characterise the extent of asymptomatic infections and community transmission, identify the true peak in infected individuals, compared to confirmed cases within a sewer catchment and confirm 'clearance' of the COVID-19 virus from an area," Dr Stevens said.

The project is being coordinated by Water Research Australia (WRA) and has 12 utility partners, 6 health department and 10 research organisations involved. For more, visit chw.net.au or call 1800 061 514.