

Media Release

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‘WATER RESEARCH AUSTRALIA’ LEADS NATIONAL COLLABORATION ON SEWAGE SURVEILLANCE TO SUPPORT AUSTRALIA’S COVID-19 RESPONSE.

Water Research Australia (WaterRA) with the support of the Water Services Association of Australia (WSAA) is leading an innovative, Australia-wide investigation that aims to integrate reliable results of sewage testing for SARS-CoV-2 with COVID-19 health data on a national basis.

Involving experts in health, microbiology, laboratory testing, wastewater-based epidemiology (WBE) and policy communication, the initiative is a major collaborative effort across water utilities, health departments and researchers, with links to global expertise.

The national “ColoSSoS Project” – *Collaboration on Sewage Surveillance of SARS-COV-2*— will track and monitor the presence of the virus that causes COVID-19 and its persistence in the Australian sewerage network, thus providing information on where it is present in the population.

“Results from similar efforts in the Netherlands (and more recently in Australia) have shown that sewage analysis can potentially detect community spread of COVID-19, even before cases are found through the testing of individuals, which makes us confident of our project’s success,” said Project Manager Dr Dan Deere.

According to WaterRA CEO Karen Rouse, “The next step is for our project team and partners to develop and apply sensitive and robust methods that deliver results governments and the community can have confidence in. We have already started collecting and analysing sewage samples nationally and will be integrating these results with health data to help guide and optimise direct management of this COVID-19 pandemic, and ensure we are well prepared for future outbreaks.”

Dr Dan Deere said, “ColoSSoS aims to provide a powerful tool for decision-makers. The data it generates will potentially reveal cases in areas previously thought to be free from COVID-19; identify the extent of asymptomatic infections within communities; better characterise trends, peak infections and the persistence or re-emergence of disease; and verify whether COVID-19 has been eradicated in local populations.”

The immediate practical application of project findings could be to inform policy regarding tightening or loosening of disease control measures such as limits on gatherings and travel, and to enable effective targeting of investment and pandemic control efforts.

WaterRA is proactively working with all state and health authorities through the Environmental Health Standing Committee (enHealth), to ensure that project results can readily inform national COVID-19 control efforts. “The ColoSSoS Project is a key initiative, not just for assisting in combatting the current COVID-19 pandemic, but for the future role of sewage surveillance as a tool to assist in safeguarding public health from infectious diseases.”

For further information on the ColoSSoS Project please contact:

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or visit the **Water Research Australia** website / www.waterra.com.au/research/communities-of-interest/covid-19/