



PIMA COUNTY

WASTEWATER RECLAMATION

COVID-19 FAQs

1. Is it true that COVID-19 has been detected in sewage?

Yes, sewers typically mirror the activities of a community so, if it is present within our community, COVID-19 it will be detected in our sewers.

It should be pointed out, the presence of COVID-19 in the sewer is no indication of infectivity, it is merely the confirmation of presence of genetic material. Because PCR is the technique used to identify COVID-19 RNA signature, there is no way to distinguish whether it is dead, live or infectious.

2. Can the COVID-19 virus spread through sewerage systems?

It's extremely unlikely. COVID-19 infection is primarily respiratory in nature and the genetic material detected in untreated wastewater is the result of co-infection within the gastrointestinal tract that tends to shed for 2-4 weeks after symptoms.

Both the CDC and WHO have indicated "There is no evidence to date that COVID-19 virus has been transmitted via sewerage systems, with or without wastewater treatment."

3. Can wastewater employees be infected by the COVID-19 present in wastewater?

Also extremely unlikely. Wastewater employees are accustomed to adhering to industry practices required for hygiene and PPE for protection against biological pathogens.

The CDC, Water Research Foundation and WateReuse Association have further stated that "No additional COVID-19-specific protections are recommended for workers involved in wastewater management, including those at wastewater treatment facilities.

4. Does wastewater treatment kill COVID-19?

Yes, wastewater treatment plants treat viruses and other pathogens every day. In fact, COVID-19 is an enveloped virus and is extremely susceptible to the disinfection processes used at all RWRD treatment facilities.

5. What has Pima County RWRD done to monitor COVID-19 in the sewers?

Pima County RWRD along with the UArizona WEST Center have initiated sewerage surveillance to help track the spread of COVID-19. Because many people are asymptomatic, sewer surveillance may help serve as an indicator of the true prevalence of the COVID-19 virus in our community.

6. What is Pima County RWRD doing to protect sewer workers from COVID-19?

Pima County RWRD along with the UArizona WEST Center and College of Health have initiated an additional study to evaluate sewer utility worker exposure to COVID-19 bioaerosols created during the wastewater treatment and sewer maintenance.

Because COVID-19 is primarily respiratory in nature, this study will help determine utility worker exposure and the risks associated with COVID-19 present in bioaerosols. This is an important step towards the protection of utility workers worldwide.