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Central Highlands Water joins national sewage investigation to support Australia's coronavirus (COVID-19) response

Central Highlands Water (CHW) is pleased to be part of a national research project to test, track and monitor the presence of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes coronavirus, in the sewerage network.

The project is an innovative collaboration, led by Water Research Australia (WaterRA), and includes water utilities, health departments and researchers, with links to global expertise.

The genetic material of coronavirus, not the live virus, can be present in the sewage. Testing sewage could identify and track coronavirus and help to inform the levels of the virus within the community.

A similar research project in the Netherlands has shown that sewage testing has the potential to detect coronavirus in a community even before individual testing.

CHW's Managing Director, Paul O'Donohue said, "CHW is pleased to support this innovative Australia-wide research project that could have major public health ramifications in our response to the coronavirus pandemic."

"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," said Mr O'Donohue.

Weekly sewage samples are taken from a number of local wastewater treatment plants by CHW operators, and is then forwarded to Melbourne for testing. CHW will provide 24 weeks of sampling.

Coronavirus is just one of many viruses that may be present in wastewater. Coronavirus is a weaker virus that cannot grow outside of a host and, as such, current treatment processes are more than sufficient. Our existing safe work practices still apply and no specific changes need to be made due to coronavirus.

CHW reassures customers that we have plans in place to continue supplying our water and wastewater services to our communities.

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