



FREDERICK COUNTY GOVERNMENT
OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Jan H. Gardner
County Executive

News Release

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County Undertakes Innovative Approach to Studying Coronavirus

Wastewater Testing Provides Tool to Measure Community Health

FREDERICK, Md. – Frederick County Government is taking an innovative approach to help public health officials assess the severity of the community’s COVID-19 outbreak. Any infected person, whether or not they are experiencing symptoms, sheds the virus. So Frederick County is testing untreated wastewater at its largest plant to gain insights on how widespread the virus is.

Frederick County began testing wastewater at its Ballenger-McKinney wastewater treatment plant in early May, contracting with a Massachusetts company to test samples. In June, the County switched to a Maryland company, CosmosID® in Rockville. Beginning this week, samples from the City of Frederick’s Gas House Pike Wastewater Treatment Plant will be included as part of the testing program.

“Frederick County is leading the way in Maryland with this work,” County Executive Jan Gardner said. “We may be able to detect trends or a new wave of infections before it is widely spread in our community. This study puts another tool in our toolbox as we try to learn more about this highly contagious virus.”

The coronavirus has been detected in some wastewater samples, but the data are still undergoing analysis, and it is too early to detail any findings. When an analysis is available, it will be discussed at a future public information briefing.

“This is another great example of how all of the Frederick County Government divisions have stepped up to explore what they can do,” Frederick County Health Officer Dr. Barbara Brookmyer said. “This will serve as the closest we will get to a complete population survey in the areas served by the participating wastewater treatment plants. The samples are anonymous and represent the community as a whole and the amount of virus that is being shed. It is one more source of information that we can use to better understand how the SARS-CoV-2 virus is impacting us in Frederick County.

A study of COVID 19 in wastewater will allow public health officials to track trends and changes, which could provide early detection of a new wave of infections.

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