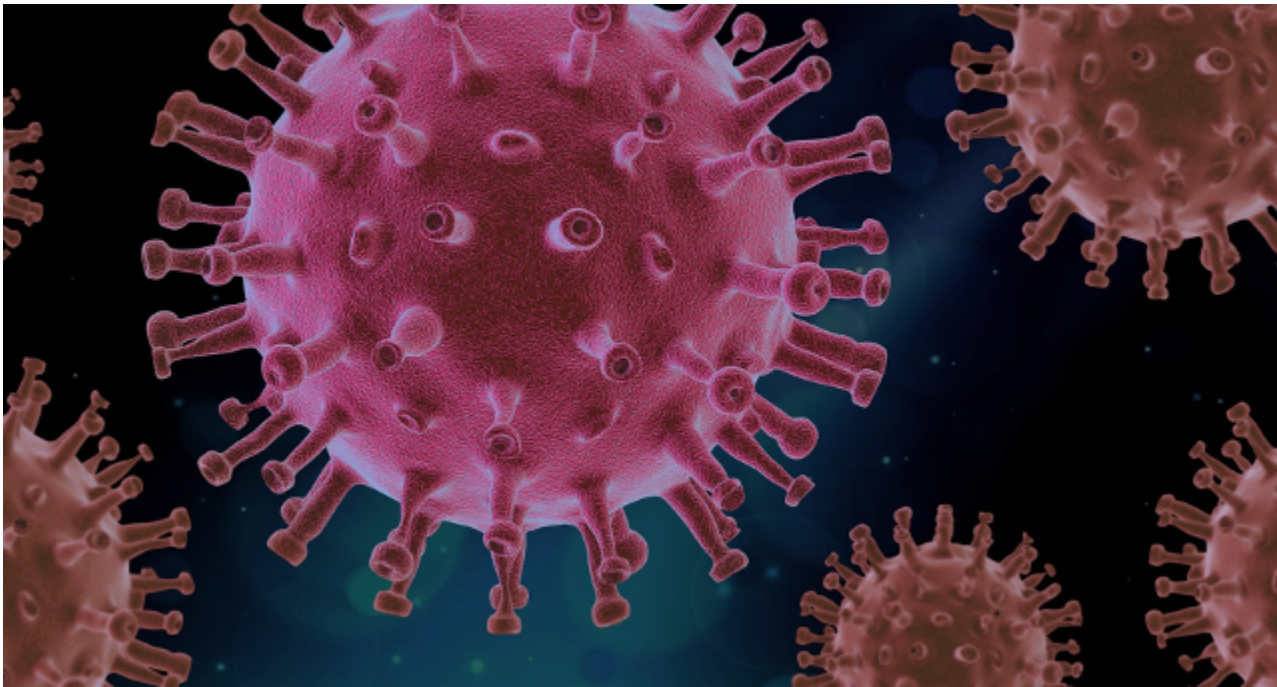


The Discovery Partners Institute And The Illinois Department Of Public Health Launch An Online COVID-19 Tracker

by Lauryn Scott

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CHICAGO - The Discovery Partners Institute (DPI) and the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) announced today [a new website](#) that tracks the levels of COVID-19 in wastewater samples in Chicago and other cities across Illinois.

The interactive online tool builds on the statistics posted on the CDC's COVID Data Tracker website and provides more Illinois-specific data in easy-to-understand charts.

“This data is now going to be available to researchers and the public alike, giving everyone as accurate picture as possible for the pandemic,” said Bill Jackson, executive director of DPI. “This is a game-changer in terms of transparency and public health awareness, and we applaud IDPH for partnering with us on this bold step.”

“Wastewater surveillance is a great tool that can help detect and monitor COVID-19, the flu and other pathogens,” said Dr. Sameer Vohra, IDPH director. “This new website is designed to inform and educate residents of Illinois and will give them the ability to make informed decisions about how to protect themselves.”

On the new site, visitors can search by city or county for up-to-date figures and trendlines from any one of 75 wastewater treatment plants around Illinois that are voluntarily collecting samples of raw sewage to be screened for the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Samples are collected twice a week and taken to a high-throughput lab at the University of Illinois Chicago for analysis and then to Argonne National Laboratory for genetic sequencing to identify virus variants.

Monitoring wastewater for the coronavirus has been proven to be an accurate and cost-effective way to measure COVID-19’s presence in a community. Genetic material from viruses and other germs is excreted in the feces and urine of infected people, eventually showing up in the raw sewage piped into purification facilities.

Public health authorities increasingly have come to rely on wastewater tallies now that people generally have switched to doing at-home COVID-19 testing and are not reporting results.

The DPI team recently began screening sewage samples for influenza A and B for IDPH, and the goal is to share these results on the dashboard, too, as soon as possible.

“Additionally, the vision is to provide online modules for all the different levels of experience and ages — from kindergarteners to seniors — to show the usefulness of the information and bring fun into learning about wastewater research,” said Sandra Gesing, DPI wastewater team lead and senior research scientist.

DPI, which is part of the University of Illinois System, began its wastewater surveillance effort in 2020, partnering with UIC and Argonne as well as Northwestern University, which assists in data modeling and analytics.

The Illinois Wastewater Surveillance System website is the latest move to expand DPI’s portfolio of services. Drawing from its experience, DPI has joined with UIC and Rush University Medical Center to collect and analyze wastewater to identify the presence of

potentially deadly antibiotic-resistant organisms in long-term care facilities. DPI and Shield T3, a for-profit startup spun out of University of Illinois, are also conducting a pilot program to test wastewater for the coronavirus at Illinois public schools.

Under a separate contract, the DPI-led team also collects and analyzes supplemental samples from sewers in Chicago neighborhoods and O'Hare International Airport and shares these test results with the Chicago Department of Public Health. The Chicago data on the new dashboard is based only on samples taken at the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago treatment plants that serve the city.