



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

PRESS RELEASE

Wastewater programme expanded across Wales

A Welsh Government-led programme to test wastewater for COVID-19 has been expanded to cover all Welsh health boards and local authorities across 48 sites.

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The programme provides vital data on the prevalence of coronavirus in the community and was key to the early detection of the Omicron wave across Wales.

The process of identifying coronavirus in wastewater was initially developed by scientists from Bangor University who have been working in partnership with the Welsh Government, Cardiff University, Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water and Hafren Dyfrdwy. The initial concept and processes are now used in work being undertaken across the UK.

All 48 sites in Wales now have automated monitoring equipment installed to provide wastewater samples which scientists can test to give insights into the virus.

Health and Social Services Minister Eluned Morgan said:

“ The wastewater data has helped us to understand how the pandemic has changed and allowed us to follow the Omicron wave through our communities.

“ With the help of the scientists and water companies in Wales, we have increased the monitoring sites from 19 to 48 and introduced automatic sampling equipment providing even more detailed insights into wastewater testing compared with the methods we originally adopted. ”

Chief Scientific Adviser for Health Rob Orford said:

“ Wastewater monitoring has the potential to be representative of the true levels of COVID-19 in our communities, as it is less affected by changes to community testing policy and whether or not people get tested.

“ We are keen to continue to explore how wastewater can play an important part of our future testing strategy as we begin to move from pandemic to endemic. Wastewater also has some exciting potential beyond COVID-19 and could be used to monitor the levels of many other viruses like influenza and anti-microbial resistance. ”

Professor David Jones from Bangor University's School of Natural Sciences, who co-leads the development of the testing technology, said:

“ COVID-19 has been a huge learning curve for virology, and our wastewater testing has been able to identify new variants of the virus in almost real-time, so we welcome its expansion across Wales. We know that the faster the data can be produced, the better informed public health officials can be in making important decisions about the measures needed. ”