

Thursday, 5 August 2021

PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT

COVID-19 viral fragments detected in Wollongong and Bomaderry sewage

Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District is urging the Wollongong and Shoalhaven communities to get tested with even the mildest symptoms of COVID-19 after fragments of the virus were detected in samples from the Wollongong and Bomaderry sewage treatment plants.

There have been active cases of COVID-19 in these areas, but the District is asking the community to act at the first sign of symptoms in case the samples are an indication of other, undiagnosed cases.

ISLHD Director Public Health Curtis Gregory said while this fragment detection could be explained by the known cases in these areas, sewage testing was an important tool in providing early warning of any undetected infections in an area.

“High rates of testing are critical to ensuring that COVID-19 is not circulating undetected in the community,” Mr Gregory said.

“Anyone feeling unwell – even with the mildest of symptoms - such as a runny nose or scratchy throat - must seek testing and self-isolate until they get their result.

“Stay at home, and do not go to work, the shops, or catch public transport until you receive a negative test result.”

The samples were collected as part of NSW Health’s ongoing surveillance program to test sewage for traces of the virus to support the public health response to the pandemic.

The **Wollongong sewage catchment** serves 56,000 people in the suburbs of Lake Heights, Cringila, Warrawong, Brownsville, Dapto, Berkeley, Huntley, Horsley, Cleveland, Mangerton, Mount Saint Thomas, Unanderra, Spring Hill, Mount Keira, Figtree, Mount Kembla, West Wollongong, Kembla Heights, Cordeaux Heights, Farmborough Heights, Dombarton, Kembla Grange, Wongawilli, Coniston, Wollongong and Port Kembla.

The **Bomaderry sewage catchment serves** 18,000 people in the suburbs of Bomaderry, Cambewarra, Cambewarra Village, Meroo Meadow and some parts of North Nowra.

Anyone who lives or works in any of these areas is asked to be particularly vigilant for the onset of symptoms that could signal COVID-19. If even if the mildest of symptoms appear, it is important get tested immediately and isolate until a negative result is received.

Detection of virus fragments in sewage can also be due to shedding of the virus by someone who may have previously had the illness and may no longer be infectious. It can also be the

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result of a person with COVID-19 who may have visited the community and has since left the area.

As well as being present in stools, viral fragments can enter the sewer when washed off hands and bodies through sinks and showers.

Usual sewage treatment processes inactivate, or kill, the COVID-19 virus.

Further testing will be undertaken as the NSW Health research program continues. For more information on the NSW Health research program, please visit <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/sewage-surveillance.aspx>

For the week ending Sunday 1 August, there were 19,185 COVID tests carried out in the Illawarra Shoalhaven.

“Each time we have called on the community to come forward for testing, we have seen a great response,” Mr Gregory said.

“We would like to thank those who have presented for COVID-19 testing in light of the recent developments in NSW. It’s a big help in ensuring we stay on top of the virus.

“As we have done throughout the pandemic, we continue to monitor the number of people presenting to our testing clinics and scale our operating hours based on demand. We ask that people be patient when waiting for a test or swab results.”

To help meet any demand for additional testing, Southern IML have established a pop-up drive-through clinic at the Bernie Regan Sporting Complex, West Cambewarra Rd, Nowra – entry via Illaroo Rd. It will be open 8am-5pm from tomorrow, and then seven days a week, while required.

Additionally, the Nowra Showground Laverty Pop up Drive-Through Clinic is extending its opening hours until 5pm and will be open 8am-5pm tomorrow.

There are a number of testing clinics throughout the Local Health District and a full list of local testing clinic locations and opening hours is available on the District’s website at: <https://www.islhd.health.nsw.gov.au/services-clinics/public-health-unit/infectious-diseases/covid-19-latest-advice-and-resources-6>

You can also stay up to date by following the [ISLHD Facebook page](#).

There are more than 410 testing clinics open across NSW. For a complete list of COVID-19 testing clinics and booking details, please visit <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/clinics.aspx>