

Local rates of flu, RSV show up in a city's wastewater

October 11 2023, by Cara Murez



Toilet bowls reveal much about the health of a community, alerting

scientists to coming outbreaks of flu and other seasonal viruses, researchers say.

"Just one flush can hold a lot of information," said Kristine Du, co-author of a new Canadian study.

"Wastewater surveillance equips [public health experts](#), clinicians, policymakers and the public with community-based, objective data to inform health and safety decisions against the flu and RSV," said Du, a lab technician at the University of Calgary School of Medicine.

"Knowing what viruses are coming down the pike can help prepare individuals and communities appropriately," she added in a university news release.

Du and her colleagues found that the clinical cases of influenza A and B, as well as [respiratory syncytial virus](#) (RSV) correlated closely with virus positivity rates from [wastewater](#) surveillance in Calgary.

Wastewater surveillance rose in prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this new research builds on that.

The study included data from weekly collections of 24-hour composite wastewater samples from three treatment plants in Calgary between March 2022 and April 2023. The samples were then compared to [clinical data](#) for total cases and test positivity rates across Calgary and Alberta.

The researchers found that influenza A peaked in Calgary's wastewater between November and December 2022. Influenza B peaked between February and April 2023. RSV's peak was between November 2022 and February 2023.

The results of wastewater monitoring offer a novel surveillance approach that can be independent of and complementary to clinical testing, the study authors said.

The investigators also suggest adding more respiratory [viruses](#) to wastewater surveillance capabilities.

The findings are scheduled for presentation at [IDWeek 2023](#), opening Wednesday in Boston. IDWeek is an annual meeting of several organizations, including the Infectious Diseases Society of America. Findings presented at medical meetings are considered preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [wastewater surveillance](#).

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