Adam Link  
Executive Director  
California Association of Sanitation Agencies  
1225 8th St. Ste 595  
Sacramento. CA 95814

Dear Mr. Link:

Thank you for your recent letter to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director, regarding our efforts to utilize wastewater data as a cost-effective tool to assess and manage community outbreaks of SARS-CoV-2. I am responding on behalf of the Director.

With more than 5,000 personnel supporting the pandemic emergency response, CDC is at the forefront of the federal government’s efforts to control the spread of COVID-19. Our decades fighting pandemics gives us the experience needed to mitigate the impact of this virus to the American public.

Recently, the virus that causes COVID-19 has been found in untreated wastewater. While data are limited, there is no information to date that anyone has become sick with COVID-19 because of exposure to wastewater. At this time, the risk of transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19 through properly designed and maintained sewerage systems is thought to be low. Standard practices associated with wastewater treatment plant operations should be sufficient to protect workers involved in wastewater management, including those at wastewater treatment facilities, from the virus that causes COVID-19. These standard practices can include engineering and administrative controls, hygiene precautions, specific safe work practices, and personal protective equipment (PPE) normally required when handling untreated wastewater. No additional COVID-19–specific protections are recommended for workers involved in wastewater management, including those at wastewater treatment facilities.

For surveillance of COVID-19, CDC is in the early stages of evaluating a sewage model for estimation of community infection prevalence from SARS-CoV-2 concentrations in sewage. Findings from CDC’s scientific assessment of the reliability and utility of sewage surveillance for public health action will be used to inform how sewage surveillance can be strategically implemented nationally and the scope of resources needed to implement this new surveillance strategy. There is encouraging evidence of the usefulness of the sewage model, but we need to learn more. If the model proves useful for informing response decisions, the next steps will be to recruit partner laboratories to conduct sewage testing for a network of sentinel sites. CDC will work closely with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to identify sentinel sites where sewage surveillance is likely to produce actionable data. CDC is working with the Water Research Foundation, the Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL), and EPA to facilitate a round
robins evaluation of sewage testing methods. CDC has funded APHL to evaluate their capacity to offer this testing in the future, as CDC does not foresee offering testing directly.

In this fast-moving pandemic, we are adjusting our response and guidance as conditions change and as we learn more about this emerging infectious disease. Please regularly visit our COVID-19 website www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html for CDC’s latest and most up-to-date information, resources, and guidance.

We appreciate California Association of Sanitation Agencies’ interest and support in this ongoing response. Thank you, again, for the work you do to support your members that provide essential water and wastewater services for the American people, as CDC remains committed to protecting the American public in the face of this pandemic.

Sincerely,

Erin K. Sauber-Schatz, PhD, MPH
CDR, US Public Health Service
Task Force Lead
Community Interventions and Critical Populations Task Force
CDC COVID-19 Emergency Response