

State begins wastewater surveillance at CYFD, correctional facilities

Written by Gallupsun Staff
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Monitoring sewage may offer early detection, help with testing

Staff Reports

New Mexico began its initial phase of the New Mexico Wastewater Surveillance System, a COVID-19 wastewater monitoring program at congregate settings, in the southwest region of New Mexico the week of Dec.7.

This approach led by the New Mexico Environment Department and done in cooperation with other state agencies and local governments, allows for early detection of COVID-19 in congregate facilities and helps prioritize the use of individual-based testing resources (e.g. nasal swab testing).

Included in the initial effort are several federal, state and local correctional and Children, Youth and Families Department facilities.

“My administration will continue to use every resource at our disposal to track and stop this virus, to prevent outbreaks and illness and to save New Mexican lives,” Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham said. “And we will innovate and create our own new resources and programs to execute that mission, as well.”

“The Environment Department is on the cutting edge of using science and innovation to improve public health outcomes for New Mexicans,” NMED Cabinet Secretary James Kenney said. “The pandemic has called for unprecedented levels of collaboration among government agencies, and we appreciate the cooperation of state and local agencies to aid in protecting vulnerable populations during our fight against COVID.”

“Information provided by this testing will help CYFD streamline our own decision-making so we can put our testing resources where we need them most and provide the safest possible environment in our facilities,” CYFD Cabinet Secretary Brian Blalock said.

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NMED and its contractor ERG, will collect samples twice a week from these facilities. The samples will be analyzed for concentrations of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes the COVID-19 illness. Since the virus is excreted in bodily fluids before an infected person experiences symptoms, this data can be used as an early indicator of spread in the facility and a trigger to initiate testing of individuals at the facility. Wastewater surveillance also detects when the virus is shed by asymptomatic individuals.

The southwest region was selected for this initial phase due to its high positivity rates and lower-than-average rates of testing. The program may expand to other areas of the state and other types of facilities as resources allow.