

FIELD WORKER SAFETY DURING THE PANDEMIC

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Wastewater testing for SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) has become increasingly common in the United States. Generally, the intent of these studies is to track neighborhood-level trends in SARS-CoV-2 concentrations and loads to assess whether the SARS-CoV-2 signal in wastewater can be useful as a preview for COVID-19 cases at the city-scale.

Measuring the virus in wastewater does not involve detecting infectious virus, but instead looks for RNA sequences that are unique to SARS-CoV-2. In fact, studies performed to date have shown that COVID-19 does not appear to be transmissible via wastewater. For that reason, the CDC indicates that standard safety practices—including engineering and administrative controls, hygiene precautions, and personal protective equipment (PPE)—normally worn when handling wastewater are adequate for protecting workers when handling wastewater known to contain SARS-CoV-2.

Although it appears that the virus is not active or transmissible in wastewater, the airborne virus is nonetheless prevalent throughout society and extra precautions should be taken by individuals in the field to ensure that they are adequately protected. In addition to utilizing traditional PPE for sewer work activities including gloves (latex and work), hard hats, gas monitors, sunscreen and steel-toed boots, workers should follow CDC guidelines while COVID-19 is still a major threat. These guidelines include:

- **Hand sanitizing**
- **Regular hand washing**
- **Social distancing**
- **Wearing masks when not able to social distance**
 - Indoors, inside vehicles (CCTV trucks) whenever workers are within close proximity to each other or the public
- **Knowing COVID symptoms and not going to work with symptoms unless negative test results have been received**

In addition to the commonly recognized guidelines listed above, most companies utilize a written safety manual that should be kept in work vehicles and updated annually, especially with the current pandemic. Mandatory review and training should be conducted by a professional or appropriate company personnel such as the safety officer. There are many hazards associated with working in and around sewers, manholes and lift stations and each hazard should be understood and have an appropriate equalizer for every potential hazard.

Take a few minutes and review OSHA's primary resource for all things COVID, the COVID-19 Safety and Health Topics Page (osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19). This web page is routinely updated, and we encourage you to review it frequently. General guidance on this resource page includes topics like:




- **Ten Steps All Workplaces Can Take to reduce Risk of Exposure to Coronavirus Poster**
- **COVID-19 Hazard Recognition**
- **COVID-19 Control and Prevention**
- **Videos Providing Quick Safety Tips**
- **Frequently Asked Questions and Answers**

Lastly, there are some additional steps field workers should consider depending on their type of work. Some of these include:

- **First aid training**
- **CPR training**
- **Confined space training**
- **Maintaining a healthy lifestyle and maximizing immune system (adequate sleep, exercise, hydration, nutrition, supplements, reducing alcohol intake, quit smoking etc.)**
- **Vaccines**

We have become more health conscious in 2020 (which is a good thing!) and people will hopefully reduce the spread of viruses with more common-sense hygiene, and not try to be a hero by coming to work when they are sick and just pushing through it. Going to work while sick has massive potential to spread viruses to our coworkers, clients, and the general public and should be avoided at all costs. To learn more about COVID safety, please visit nassco.org/covid-19-support.

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