



March 2, 2021

KEVIN O'REILLY  
MLA, FRAME LAKE

**Oral Question 561-19(2): Wastewater Testing**

This letter is in follow up to the Oral Question you raised on February 12, 2021 regarding Wastewater Testing.

I am pleased to advise you that the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) has updated the COVID-19 dashboard to include wastewater test results. You can find it on the COVID-19 dashboard under wastewater tab at <https://www.gov.nt.ca/covid-19/>. This soft launch ensures the dashboard is functioning well prior to taking steps to profile to the public. Social media notices will be forthcoming this week as we recognize the interest in this initiative by community governments, the public and other jurisdictions.

Testing wastewater is a way to determine if COVID-19 is present in the community. Public health officials assess if positive test results or signals are anticipated or unanticipated. While a signal can't confirm numbers of cases in a community, the trend in the strength of a signal – increasing or decreasing – can provide important information to guide public health actions for that community. Wastewater results are presented by community and include all results from the time sampling started. Results are posted as soon as they have been reviewed by the Office of the Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO).

Although detailed wastewater results have not been public until now, the CPHO has reported results publicly when a positive signal has been received during these past months. While the public can now see whether a wastewater signal is increasing, decreasing or remaining stable, the interpretation of a signal requires additional information such as the status of COVID-19 cases or an outbreak situation that may exist for a community at that time. The assessment of these other factors is very important in determining if public health action is warranted; there will always be public health advice issued by the CPHO should there be an unexpected signal received for a community that is notably above the level of detection. For example, there may be occasions where a trace positive signal is being monitored but does not require public health action. In these instances, the public would not be notified but the results would be available on the dashboard.

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The Department of Health and Social Services is proud of this new surveillance program. We are also pleased to introduce new ways of providing time-sensitive information to residents as demonstrated by the deployment of the COVID-19 dashboard. Interactive web-based dashboards are relatively new for the GNWT and we are building our technical capability.

I appreciate your interest and welcome any feedback you may have.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "JAGreen". The letters are cursive and connected.

Julie Green  
Minister of Health and Social Services

c Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

Legislative Coordinator  
Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs