



United States Senate

July 16, 2020

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Secretary

Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

The Honorable Andrew R. Wheeler
Administrator

Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Secretary Azar and Administrator Wheeler,

In light of promising new research on the potential for early detection of COVID-19 outbreaks through the testing of wastewater, I write to ask that the Department of Health and Human Services and the Environmental Protection Agency expedite efforts to develop and implement a nationwide COVID-19 wastewater surveillance program.

Testing wastewater has long been successfully used as a method for early detection of polio and cholera disease outbreaks. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, wastewater surveillance is now being implemented in Finland, Germany, and the Netherlands, and communities in California, Massachusetts and Arizona have begun exploring this approach in partnership with universities and the CDC.

Effective wastewater surveillance holds the potential to detect an outbreak in a community up to a week before people start showing up in the hospital. This advanced warning would allow all levels of government to preposition medical supplies, shore up hospitals in the affected community, and begin locking down the area.

Given surging caseloads in many states, it is clear that the United States needs to find innovative ways to get ahead of the curve, and I urge you to prioritize funding to implement nationwide wastewater surveillance efforts related to COVID-19. Thank you for your consideration of this request, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dianne Feinstein".

Dianne Feinstein

United States Senator

DF/dt/jw