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Dr. Charles Stringham

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Mike Bell, County Commissioner

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Humboldt County Health Board

Humboldt County Courthouse
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Winnemucca, Nevada 89445



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HEALTH BOARD TO BEGIN NOTIFYING RESIDENTS IN HIGH COVID-19 CONCENTRATION AREAS

WINNEMUCCA, Nev— The City of Winnemucca has launched an early detection system for COVID-19 that relies on wastewater from homes and businesses to help identify disease clusters before they spread.

Humboldt County Health Officer Charles Stringham, MD, said “These wastewater samples can detect concentrations of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, and act as a potential early-warning system for outbreaks.”

Dr. Stringham said over the course of the coming weeks, residents may receive a notification—either by mail or as a hand bill on their door—that notifies them of a possible upward trend in their vicinity and encourages them to be tested at the first sign of symptoms.

“We don’t want people to be alarmed if they receive a notice about an increased trend in their neighborhood,” said Dr. Stringham. “Instead we want them to use that information to stay alert and to be prepared.”

The “COVID-19 Neighborhood Advisory” in English and Spanish includes brief information about the City of Winnemucca Wastewater Testing Program, a list of common COVID-19 symptoms, and a list of area testing locations. The flyer also includes contact numbers and addresses for those who would like more information.

Winnemucca City Manager Alicia Heiser, who oversees the testing program, said researchers have found that spikes in the concentration of RNA (ribonucleic acid) in the wastewater can be detected approximately five days before officials will see a spike in testing and positive case numbers.

Heiser said the City of Winnemucca retrieves five wastewater samples per week. One is a global sample taken at the headworks of the wastewater treatment plant; the other four are taken at specific manholes, which represent collection points for four separate areas of the city.

Beginning in August, results initially came back below the detectable limit of 2.6 RNA copies per mL of wastewater. However, Heiser said recent results are showing a significant spike in COVID-19 concentrations in various parts of Winnemucca.

“The City of Winnemucca cannot determine exactly how many people in the identified areas may be affected,” she said, “but the data definitely supports an upward trend in COVID-19 infections.”

Those who receive a “COVID-19 Neighborhood Advisory” notice are encouraged to be particularly watchful of any COVID-19 symptoms among the members of their household. Those who begin to feel COVID-like symptoms should be tested as soon as possible.

The doctor said early testing not only will help local health officials quickly identify cases and mitigate the virus’s spread, but it also will help ensure that those affected by the virus have the appropriate supports to weather the illness.

Any questions regarding the City of Winnemucca Wastewater Testing Program may be directed to the City of Winnemucca at (775) 623-6333 or via email at COVID19@humboldtcountynv.gov.

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