July 6, 2020 — Many people (including college students) do not show symptoms of COVID-19 (are "asymptomatic"), but can infect people both older and younger in their families and in the general population. Urgent needs exist both to protect public health and to re-establish a strong economy. Using "sentinel" tracing at the community level that confirms the presence of the virus in advance of when symptoms may or may not be seen and without the need to test individuals for the virus has recently been demonstrated by testing wastewater.

The "vantage point" of this approach is "risk management." How can we manage risks of exposure and contracting COVID-19 until a vaccine or other therapeutic cure is available? Wastewater testing indicates that the presence of the virus can be detected approximately one week before symptoms occur, if they are going to occur. Sentinel tracing of wastewater can assist in both public health protection and economic recovery.

Further, by sampling at increasing “granular” levels, for example wastewater exiting individual buildings, apartment complexes, dormitories, etc., smaller groups of people can be evaluated and determined to be safe or infected. This approach to tracing can be especially helpful to communities and educational institutions who can use the results to quickly quarantine spreaders from the larger vulnerable population. So sentinel tracing can serve as a “quick test” and another tool in the COVID-19 detection arsenal.

The podcast identifies and presents information and results of recent sentinel tracing and testing in Northern Utah cities.

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