

STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – September 3, 2020

This morning Deputy Premier and Minister for Health Hon Dr Steven Miles announced a COVID fragment was detected in sewage in the Airlie Beach, Cannon Valley, Cannonvale, Cape Conway, Jubilee Pocket, Mandalay, Mount Rooper, and Shute Harbour wastewater treatment plant.

This does not necessarily mean there is COVID-19 in the Whitsunday community, but we won't know if there are undetected cases unless people with symptoms are tested.

The positive result simply means that at some point in the past two weeks someone has either been infectious or recovering from a recent infection. Infected people's stools may contain viral fragments, and shedding can extend for several weeks beyond the person's infectious period.

It's important to step up testing to keep our community COVID free. If we don't test, we won't know. To avoid an outbreak and the restrictions which follow everyone is urged to play their part to keep the Whitsundays safe and open for business.

Wastewater sampling has commenced at a number of regional locations across Queensland. The sampling is part of a University of Queensland and Queensland Health research program to test sewage for traces of COVID-19 to support the public health response to the pandemic.

The project is being led by Queensland Alliance for Environmental Health Sciences, a collaboration between Queensland Health and the University of Queensland, with testing performed by CSIRO.

The Mackay and Townsville Public Health Units are now working with the Communicable Diseases Branch to assess COVID-19 case data.

Importantly the virus fragment was detected in sewage and has nothing to do with the quality of our drinking water. Our water is safe to drink, to shower in and to use in cooking.

We understand detections like this can make people nervous about drinking water and beach swimming. Drinking water is treated before being delivered to your tap and remains safe to drink.

The virus is killed by usual sewage treatment processes before it is discharged to the environment. The wastewater treatment process is designed to inactivate (kill) or remove even the toughest microorganisms, including viruses, bacteria and protozoa.

The fragment detected may have been a local or a visitor to the area, we may never know so it's important not to jump to conclusions. What is important is that testing increases

A pop-up testing clinic has opened at the Airlie Beach lagoon carpark from 10am – 4pm until Sunday. An additional testing site will also open, and these details will be communicated once they are finalised.

If you have any of these symptoms – get tested and isolated at home until the results are received. Respiratory symptoms are cough, sore throat and shortness of breath.

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Other symptoms can include runny nose, headache, muscle or joint pains, nausea, diarrhoea, vomiting, loss of sense of smell, altered sense of taste, loss of appetite and fatigue.

We want to assure the community, as more information on this comes to hand we will continue to keep you updated.

What you can do

Stay vigilant

Stay home from work if you are unwell, wash/sanitise your hands regularly, stay 1.5 metres from others, remember your cough etiquette by covering your coughs and sneezes and avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth too often.