

EPA Expands Research on COVID-19 in the Environment

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) continues to make COVID-19 issues a top priority. The Agency has been actively supporting response efforts across the country to protect public health. As part of these efforts, EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler is asking for a rapid review with the Science Advisory Board (SAB) to provide feedback on research needs identified by EPA's researchers. This research will enhance and build on the Agency's capabilities to address the environmental and human health impacts from the virus that causes COVID-19.

"EPA's world-class researchers are building on their already expansive body of knowledge to help mitigate the environmental and public health impacts from COVID-19," **said EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler.** "Our scientists have identified a number of research areas to focus on to further help combat and diminish the spread of COVID-19 including environmental cleanup and disinfection techniques, virus behavior in wastewater and the air, and procedures for disinfecting personal protective equipment."

A Federal Register Notice (FRN) notifying the SAB of the charge questions and the two public meetings will be published this week. Comments from the SAB will inform and help guide the Agency as it enhances its capabilities to address the environmental and human health impacts from COVID-19.

Current EPA Research on the virus that causes COVID-19

Funded primarily through the 2020 Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, EPA researchers have already begun increasing the Agency's knowledge. For example, we have begun evaluating disinfectant efficacy on different types of surfaces in public areas that are frequently touched by multiple people, such as in subway cars.

In addition, EPA researchers are collaborating with CDC researchers in several other areas, such as:

- **Environmental Cleanup and Disinfection:** The researchers are currently evaluating the use of ultraviolet (UV), ozone, and steam as solutions for large-scale disinfecting needs; for example in a school or an office. The researchers are also evaluating whether electrostatic sprayers and foggers used with EPA-approved disinfectants can be effective at killing the virus.
- **Wastewater Virus Detection:** The researchers are studying whether SARS-CoV-2 can be detected in wastewater at levels that could inform public health strategies. They will focus on understanding viral loads, or how much of the virus is present, whether it is in an infectious state, and how it moves through the wastewater system. This information will help public health agencies by acting as an early warning system and can identify if there is an outbreak in a specific community. Public health agencies can then take early action to reduce the spread of COVID-19.
- **Salivary Antibody Assay Development:** The researchers are developing an easy, non-invasive, and reliable antibody assay to help determine the true infection rate across the country.

EPA researchers are some of the leading experts in their fields and are working hard to protect public health and the environment. This is just a small sampling of the work they intend to complete in these areas.