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Covid-19: Traces of Covid-19 found in wastewater from Porirua and Wellington suburb of Karori following more tests

Mandy Te · 14:34, May 19 2021



STUFF

A new series from Stuff, in partnership with Māori Television and the Pacific Media Network, counters falsehoods about the Covid-19 vaccine.

On Wednesday, the Ministry of Health said weak positive results were detected in wastewater samples taken from Porirua and the Wellington suburb of Karori on May 16.

More wastewater samples were taken after traces of [Covid-19](#) were found in a [wastewater treatment plant in Wellington's Moa Point](#) last weekend. Health officials said [two wastewater samples](#) returned a weak positive result for Covid-19 – this was likely due to [recently recovered cases](#) continuing to shed the virus.

The new samples were taken from Moa Point, Porirua, Hutt Valley and Karori.

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The Ministry of Health said the further samples tested from Moa Point and Hutt Valley did not detect any virus fragments across May 15, May 16 and May 17.

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The samples from Porirua and Karori on May 15 and May 17 returned negative results – so Covid-19 virus fragments were not detected on those days, the ministry said.

Additional samples were taken on Tuesday and the ministry said it would provide an update on those test results on Thursday.



ESR/SUPPLIED

Wastewater testing for Covid-19 by ESR in Wellington.

"There is no risk of infection from Covid-19 in wastewater," the ministry said.

"The ministry's current assessment remains that the weak positive results are likely due to recently recovered cases continuing to shed the virus."

What is wastewater testing for Covid-19?

[Wastewater testing for Covid-19](#) first started in April 2020, with the aim of giving an early warning of outbreaks or an additional surveillance tool.

The science has been [developed since then](#), with a test in November 2020. The number of sites has steadily expanded and ESR now does regular wastewater testing across sites in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Rotorua, Hamilton and Queenstown.

The samples are [processed in ESR's laboratory in Wellington](#), and checked for accuracy – including adding a cat coronavirus and a mouse norovirus to every sample as controls.



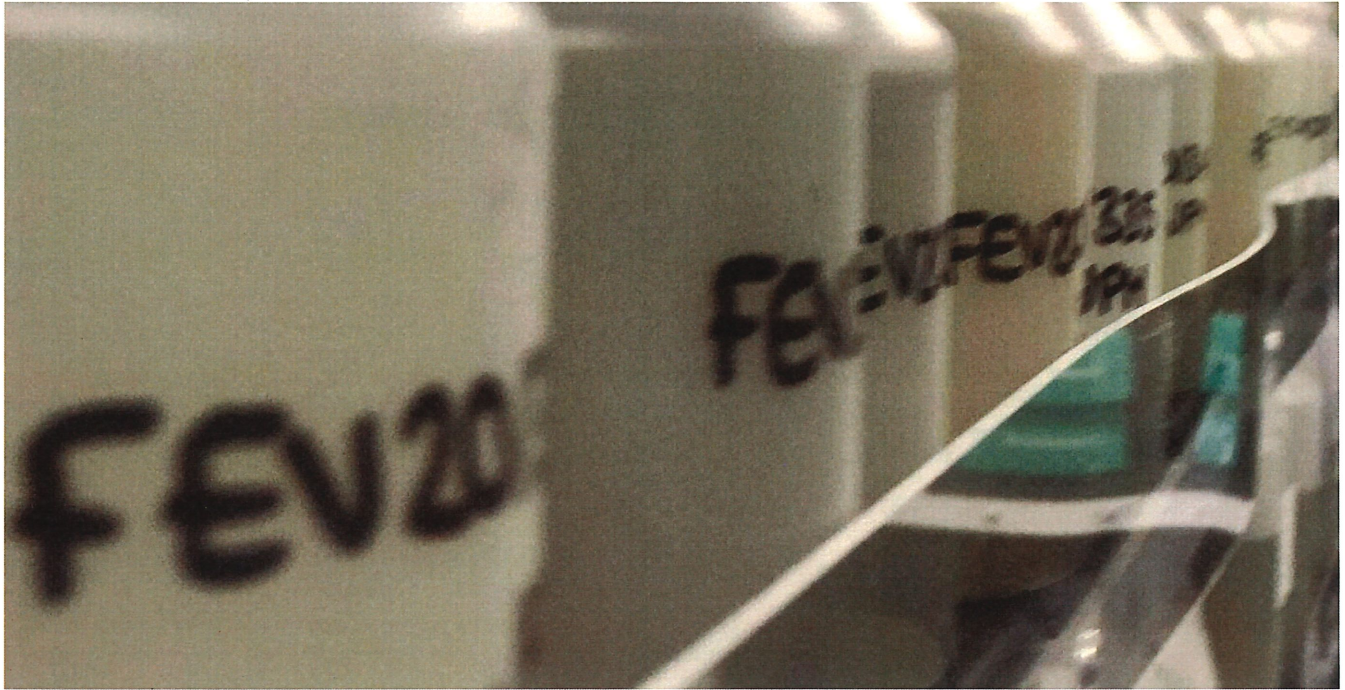
ROSA WOODS/STUFF

A nurse tests for coronavirus in Upper Hutt.

What does a weak positive test mean?

The weak positive test shows one or more people in Wellington have had coronavirus, but ESR said it did not indicate an outbreak – as consistent detection of the virus at relatively high levels would be needed to show this.

This is the reason why a series of samples are taken, rather than one-off tests.



ESR/SUPPLIED

Wastewater testing for Covid-19 can be carried out by ESR in Wellington.

“Historical cases could produce the occasional sporadic low-level result, but they are not going to produce ongoing detectable levels,” [ESR said on its website](#).

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ESR science leader Dr Brent Gilpin earlier told Checkpoint a positive test result was a sign to encourage additional testing, to ensure there was not undetected Covid-19 in the community.

Positive wastewater results [in parts of Australia](#) did not result in community cases being found.

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