

Interim Guidance: Considerations for Onsite Sewage System Providers, Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

March 10, 2020

Onsite sewage system service providers that conduct septic tank pump outs, operation and maintenance, and repairs are commonly exposed to untreated wastewater that contains disease-causing organisms. As is the case with other disease-causing organisms in wastewater, onsite sewage system providers are unlikely to know whether wastewater from the system they are pumping, maintaining, or repairing contains COVID-19. COVID-19 concentrations and survival in feces, sewage or water are currently unknown.

Guidance from the [U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#) (OSHA) states there is no evidence to suggest that additional, COVID-19 specific protections are needed for employees in wastewater management operations, and OSHA encourages workers follow routine practices to prevent exposure to wastewater. The [Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) notes that wastewater and sewage workers should use standard practices of basic hygiene precautions (e.g. handwashing) and wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) as prescribed for current work task. In consultation with local health officials, onsite sewage system service providers should consider the following routine disease prevention practices for onsite sewage system pump outs, operation and maintenance, and repairs to help protect service providers from potential infection of COVID-19.



PRIOR to COVID-19 Detection in your community

- Use physical barriers to prevent exposure to splashes or sprays of wastewater.
- Wear appropriate PPEs: eye protection (goggles, face mask, or face shield); liquid repellent coveralls and gloves.
- Be trained on how to properly put on, use, wear, take off, clean/disinfect, maintain, store, and dispose of PPEs.
- Wash hands with soap and water immediately after handling waste or sewage before eating or drinking, and before and after using the toilet.
- Avoid touching face, mouth, eyes, nose, and open sores and cuts while handling sewage.
- Remove work clothes before eating, and eat in designated areas.
- Do not chew tobacco or gum.
- Cover open sores, cuts, and wounds with clean dry bandages.
- Remove work clothes before leaving the worksite.



ONCE COVID-19 IS DETECTED in the community (low to high severity)

Once COVID-19 is detected in a community, health department recommendations addressing any change in normal operations will depend on a number of factors such as the number of cases detected, the severity of illness associated with those cases and how widespread infection is or is predicted to be based on case histories. Assessing these and other factors will help the health department determine the severity of the situation, which will help inform recommendations. Unless otherwise instructed by local officials, onsite sewage system service providers should continue to implement routine disease prevention practices for onsite sewage system pump outs, operation and maintenance, and repairs.



AFTER a COVID-19 event in your community

Once concern about COVID-19 has subsided, onsite sewage system service providers are encouraged to continue using routine disease prevention practices for onsite sewage system pump outs, operation and maintenance, and repairs. Onsite sewage system service providers are commonly exposed to untreated wastewater that contains many different disease-causing organisms, and these routine practices are necessary to help protect service providers from potential infection.