# Rise in Flu Viruses, Including H5N1 Bird Flu, Detected in U.S. Wastewater Treatment Facilities Sparks Concerns for Public Health



Wastewater treatment facilities in California and other U.S. states have recorded an unexpected rise in flu viruses, including strains of the H5N1 bird flu, indicating a possible unmonitored spread of the virus. This surveillance, which covered 59 of 190 U.S. sewage plants, noted a particular increase of Influenza A, which comprises the H5N1 strain, in locations including San Francisco, Oakland, and San Diego. Alexandria Boehm, a professor at Stanford University involved with the WastewaterSCAN initiative, suggested that this rise in detection could potentially indicate the presence of H5N1, although it does not confirm it.

The concern among experts like Marc Johnson from the University of Missouri is that these findings could reflect an undetected spread of H5N1 among birds and livestock, with fears that it could eventually affect humans. The detection of the virus in wastewater suggests it may be entering the municipal systems via routes like dairy processing centers, which are permitted to discharge into the waste stream.

Furthermore, despite no current reports of infected livestock in California—the leading dairy producer in the U.S.—the widespread distribution of milk across states raises concerns about the broader geographical spread of the virus. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is monitoring the situation and is expected to release more detailed information soon. Meanwhile, experts advocate for more specific testing and reporting to better address the potential public health implications.