

Working with Utilities: Best Practices for Health Departments

Wastewater surveillance is only possible when health departments and utilities work together. Utilities control access to the system and provide critical context for interpreting results. Building strong partnerships and earning trust are key to sustaining participation, ensuring the data remains reliable, and making it useful for long-term public health protection.

Why Engage Utilities?

- Utilities control access for sample collection and provide knowledge of upstream locations and sewershed boundaries
- Their understanding of flows, weather, and system operations explains changes in the data
- Utilities are not required to participate, so trust and partnership are necessary to access data

Benefits of Strong Partnerships



Reliable data for decision-making

Regular and coordinated sampling produces results that can be trusted for public health action



Efficient operations

Shared planning avoids duplication, reduces burden on utilities, and makes the best use of limited staff and resources



Timely response to emerging issues

When utilities and health departments communicate closely, new signals are recognized faster and can be acted on sooner



Sustained program participation

Utilities are more willing to continue sampling over time when they see transparency, value, and mutual respect in the partnership

Best Practices for Sustainable Engagement

Build relationships early

- **Reach out** before emergencies to build trust
- Schedule introductory calls or site visits to **learn about utility operations**
- Identify a consistent **point of contact** on both the health department and utility side

Define roles & expectations

- **Confirm who is responsible** for sampling, testing, reporting, and communication
- **Clarify expectations** for timelines, frequency, and how results will be shared
- Put **agreements in writing** when possible to avoid confusion

Communicate regularly

- Hold **recurring check-ins** to keep both sides aligned
- **Include utilities in decisions** about changes to sampling or target selection when possible, or at minimum provide timely updates
- **Maintain open channels** so questions or issues can be raised quickly

Support and share value

- **Provide results** in clear, accessible formats with explanation of use
- **Show how data informs** public health action and benefits the community
- **Offer protocols, training, or resource connections** when available

[Click for video example](#)



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