

New Coronavirus Frequently Asked Questions

One of the best ways to protect public health is to follow good hygiene and sanitation practices as outlined in Sandec publications. The new coronavirus spreads primarily directly from person to person when they cough, sneeze, or speak. Indirect transmission can occur by touching surfaces with your hands, and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth. These are the main pathways of transmission, not safely contained onsite sanitation, wastewater, drinking water, or solid waste. It is important to wash your hands regularly, clean and sterilise surfaces, and provide physical distancing as much as possible, especially when people share sanitation services or gather to access these services. The following are resources that address frequently asked questions.

What is the Coronavirus, and how is it transmitted?

There are multiple trusted organisations providing scientific information on COVID-19:

- World Health Organization (WHO): [Information on Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) Pandemic](#)
- Swiss Federal Institute of Public Health (BAG): [New coronavirus](#)
- Robert Koch Institut (RKI): [COVID-19 in Germany](#)
- COVID-19 Hygiene Hub: [Fighting COVID-19 through hygiene](#)
- TU Delft: [12 Facts About COVID-19 Virus In Water](#)

Why is hand washing so important?

Adequate hand washing with soap and water or cleaning hands with alcohol-based hand rub inactivates and removes the virus, preventing indirect transmission. Hand washing is always recommended to stop the spread of diseases.

- WHO: [How to properly wash your hands](#)
- COVID-19 Hygiene HUB: What to do when [soap](#) or [water](#) are limited or [greywater](#) is used for hand washing

Can the COVID-19 virus be transmitted via excreta?

The virus has been detected in faeces and in wastewater treatment plants. However, the risk of infection via wastewater or faecal sludge is considered low because if the virus is viable, the viability is rapidly reduced. Transmission is also much lower via liquids than aerosols and droplets from infected people.

- KWR Water Research Institute: [Presence of SARS-CoV-2 in sewage](#)
- ES&T Editorial: [Role of Environmental Engineers and Scientists](#)

Can COVID-19 be transmitted via shared sanitation or drinking water facilities?

Access points where people gather for services could increase person-to-person transmission because these are locations where people meet. There is a risk of direct contamination from other people when they cough, sneeze or speak, or indirectly by touching surfaces and then your face. However, the risk of infection via safely contained faecal sludge, wastewater, drinking water or menstrual hygiene products is very low. Physical distancing and functioning handwashing facilities are very important in shared facilities.

- WHO: [Water, sanitation, hygiene and waste management for COVID-19](#)

Can I be infected with the Coronavirus by drinking water or wastewater?

Common treatment methods that inactivate viruses are also effective against the coronavirus. There is no evidence that the coronavirus survives the disinfection processes for drinking water.

- WHO: [Water, sanitation, hygiene and waste management for COVID-19](#)

Can detection of the Coronavirus in wastewater be an early indicator of community-level infection?

Researchers at Eawag and other institutes are starting to research if the virus in wastewater could be an early indicator of community-level infection, which is also the case with some other pathogens.

- Eawag: [Tracking the course of the pandemic in wastewater](#)

What are recommendations for people living in dense, low-income areas or emergency settings?

In areas where distancing is difficult, shielding measures should be taken for protection, particularly for vulnerable people and groups. Coordination and planning of WASH services with all partners in refugee or emergency settings is essential to establish a clear division of labour, to avoid duplication of efforts and to make the provision of WASH services as predictable and reliable as possible.

- COVID-19 Humanitarian: [Preparing and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic including people affected by conflict or displacement](#)
- WASH Cluster: [COVID-19 WASH Resources](#)

Can I be infected with the Coronavirus via municipal solid waste, or used masks and gloves?

Secondary transmission of the virus via waste material is possible, for example, by touching used tissues, masks and gloves, which is why waste containers should be kept closed. However, there is currently no evidence that standard waste management procedures are unsafe. Waste workers have contact with co-workers and the general public and, therefore, should practice protective measures.

- European Commission: [Waste management in the context of the coronavirus crisis](#)
- International Solid Waste Association: [Waste management during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)