

Date of Hearing: August 20, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

SB 317 (Hurtado) – As Amended June 18, 2025

Policy Committee:	Health	Vote:	15 - 0
	Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials		7 - 0

Urgency: No State Mandated Local Program: No Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill codifies the California Surveillance of Wastewaters network (Cal-SuWers), which is a network of monitoring programs to test for pathogens, toxins, and other public health indicators in wastewater.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Defines "California Surveillance of Wastewaters network" or "Cal-SuWers network" to mean the statewide wastewater surveillance program administered by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), in coordination with local health departments (LHDs), wastewater utilities, academic institutions, and other partners, for the purpose of monitoring pathogens and other public health indicators.
- 2) Defines "wastewater surveillance" as the collection and analysis of wastewater samples to detect pathogens, toxins, and other public health indicators to provide early warning for infectious disease outbreaks and environmental health threats.
- 3) Requires CDPH, in consultation with participating wastewater treatment facilities, LHDs, and other subject matter experts, maintain the Cal-SuWers network of monitoring programs to test for pathogens, toxins, and other public health indicators in wastewater.
- 4) Provides that participation in the Cal-SuWers network by LHDs and wastewater treatment facilities is voluntary.
- 5) Requires CDPH work with the participating LHDs and wastewater treatment facilities to collect samples and requires CDPH arrange for testing of samples by qualified laboratories.
- 6) Authorizes CDPH to consult with, or contract with, other wastewater epidemiology projects or public health programs conducted or previously completed by nonprofits, nongovernmental organizations, academic institutions, and other governmental entities to maintain the mission of the Cal-SuWers network.
- 7) Authorizes CDPH to coordinate with health care providers, LHDs, and emergency response agencies to ensure wastewater surveillance data is used for early intervention, outbreak response, epidemiological investigations, and public health planning.
- 8) Authorizes CDPH to communicate to the general public, through a publicly accessible internet website, to provide transparency and public awareness of wastewater-based disease

monitoring. Provides that a publicly accessible internet website may be maintained by an entity other than the CDPH and must do all of the following:

- a) Provide real-time data visualization of wastewater surveillance results, including regional trends and pathogen detection patterns.
 - b) Include educational materials and resources to help the public understand how wastewater surveillance supports public health.
 - c) Be updated to ensure current information is available to residents, public health officials, and policymakers.
- 9) Authorizes CDPH to utilize external funding sources, in addition to its existing funding sources, to implement this bill. Authorizes CDPH to solicit private donations or grants and to accept moneys donated by other wastewater epidemiology or federal programs.

FISCAL EFFECT:

General Fund (GF) cost pressures in the millions of dollars annually to maintain the Cal-SuWers network and continue testing in future years. The 2025-26 state budget includes a GF allocation of \$3.25 million to support a statewide wastewater surveillance program of routine wastewater testing for detection of infectious diseases.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

[This bill requires CDPH], in consultation with participating wastewater treatment facilities, [LHDs], and other subject matter experts, to maintain the Cal-SuWers network. This network of monitoring programs will continue to test for pathogens, toxins, and other public health indicators in California wastewater. Wastewater surveillance is a proven and cost-effective tool for public health monitoring, allowing for the early detection of infectious diseases. Ensuring wastewater monitoring programs like Cal-SuWers will endure is of the upmost importance to safeguard food supply sources and California residents.

- 2) **Background. Wastewater Surveillance.** Wastewater surveillance, also known as wastewater-based epidemiology, is a public health tool used to track the presence and amount of viruses or other disease-causing pathogens in wastewater. Samples for wastewater surveillance are generally collected as the wastewater enters a wastewater treatment plant before the treatment process begins to remove microbes, contaminants, and debris. While testing wastewater samples cannot determine the exact number of infected persons in the area being monitored, testing can aid understanding about the presence or spread of diseases within a community to supplement other sources of public health information. For example, people infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 can shed the virus in their feces for several days before they are able to get tested. Those viral fragments end up in the sewage from the entire community. Testing a small sample of wastewater from the wastewater treatment plant for viral material can quickly provide information about how much COVID-

19 is impacting the entire community, even as people change their testing habits over time, and can provide early warning of increasing disease in a community. Early warning helps public health workers, the community, and the healthcare system prepare.

CDPH coordinates with wastewater utilities, LHDs, academic researchers, and laboratories in California on wastewater surveillance for infectious disease pathogens of interest to public health (such as COVID-19, influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), mpox, and norovirus). Cal-SuWers functions through voluntary participation by LHDs, wastewater treatment agencies, and other subject matter experts. Data collected from the Cal-SuWers Network is submitted to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Wastewater Surveillance System. CDPH Cal-SuWers Program tests samples from several counties across the state.

Funding for Cal-SuWers. According to information provided by the Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts, Cal-SuWers was funded and operated through a five-year Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity (ELC) grant from CDC, which had two years remaining when this bill was introduced. The cost of physically collecting the wastewater samples is currently borne by the participating sanitation district on a voluntary basis, or sometimes subsidized partially by the CDC ELC grant. CDPH, with support from the ELC grant, conducts the lab testing for Cal-SuWers.

In March 2025, CDPH received notice that CDC intends to immediately end a significant amount of state and local public health funding. CDPH estimates grant terminations will result in a loss of at least \$840 million of federal funding, including the ELC grant.

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