

Yarmouth, Maine, SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) Wastewater Testing Results — December 22, 2023 Update

Due to sustained high levels of COVID virus in Yarmouth's wastewater, we are raising the COVID-O-Meter to HIGH.

- Wastewater SARS-CoV-2 viral levels remained high in tests on December 20 (Biobot & Verily laboratories) and 21 (Verily laboratory). The Biobot viral level on December 20 was 1,931 copies/mL, which is slightly higher than the level of 1,869 copies/mL on December 13. These sustained high levels support raising the COVID-O-Meter to the HIGH level, as levels approaching 2,000 copies/mL match those seen during viral peaks in May and October 2022 and February 2023.
- At this time wastewater viral levels are the best measure of community virus transmission. We believe that the reported case numbers represent a small fraction of the cases that are occurring within our community. We are aware of many cases among people we know that have not been reported and, therefore, believe that the wastewater data gives us a more accurate representation of the state of infections within our community.



We recommend that the Yarmouth community increase efforts to reduce COVID transmission.

- Get vaccinated and boosted. An updated monovalent booster based on the recently circulating variant (XBB.1.5) is now available in Maine. Appointments for vaccination with the updated booster are available at pharmacies in Yarmouth.
- Any time you have symptoms, isolate yourself from people and use a rapid antigen test for 2 days in a row to determine if you have COVID.
- If you test positive for COVID or believe you have a COVID infection, discuss the value of medications for COVID with your doctor. These medications can shorten the length and severity of the illness and likely reduce transmission to others. In addition, tell the people with whom you have been in contact during the 2 days prior to your positive test that they may have been exposed.
- If you have COVID, our advice is to use the antigen (home) test to decide how long you need to be isolated: Stay home and isolate until your antigen test is negative.
 - We have reviewed the U.S. CDC recommendations about what people who have COVID should do to reduce transmission to others. One point of confusion has been what to do with a positive antigen test. The CDC guidance is overly complex and is based on the number of days since a positive COVID test or symptom onset. This is the reason we suggest the simplified guidance above, which is based on the results of antigen testing.
 - The intensity of the line on the antigen test reflects the amount of virus that you are shedding, and the intensity will decrease as you recover from COVID. When the line disappears, you are no longer transmitting the virus.
 - The average time for antigen tests to become negative and viral shedding to end is around 7-10 days. But the time can be shorter and, regrettably, longer (up to 21 days). Remember that early in the pandemic we knew this and recommended that everyone stay home for 21 days.

- Persons who are immune compromised due to medical conditions or medical treatments should take particular care, as should those around them.
 - If you have a positive antigen test, don't go around people that are immune compromised or over 70 years of age. (Safest)
 - To be cautious, when gathering with people at higher risk, test with a rapid antigen test and wear a mask.
- With the public health emergency lifted, it is left to individuals to decide what exposures and risks are acceptable. In some situations, individuals may want the lowest risk, while others may feel socialization, employment, or other practical considerations are their highest priority.
 - If you must go out and your test is still positive, you may leave isolation after five days if your symptoms are improved and you don't have a fever. But, wear a mask until your antigen test is negative.
- If you want the lowest risk of transmission,
 - Avoid crowded indoor spaces;
 - Wear a mask in indoor public places, particularly if you are unvaccinated, 60 years of age or older, or immunocompromised; and
 - When indoors, ensure that there is good ventilation (air exchange).