Since 2020, COVID-19 surveillance has been an important part of the continued work of the Chester County Health Department. Following the end of the Federal COVID-19 Emergency Declaration, reporting of positive lab reports for SARS-CoV-2 virus is now voluntary. The Health Department does not investigate all positive COVID-19 lab reports. This report includes additional surveillance strategies that support maintaining general surveillance of COVID-19 in the community.

COVID-19 Reported Cases
The Chester County Health Department receives lab reports for SARS-CoV-2, but on a voluntary basis. These data are difficult to compare to trends prior to May 2023 when mandatory reporting ended.

COVID-19 Estimate – Emergency Department Visits and Hospitalizations
In lieu of positive COVID-19 laboratory reports, one way to estimate COVID-19 in the community is through local Emergency Department visit and hospitalization data. An Emergency Department Visit is defined as an individual with a confirmed COVID-19 laboratory result seeking care at a hospital located in Chester County. This individual may or may not have been admitted to the hospital and may be visiting the hospital for a reason other than a COVID-19 diagnosis. A hospitalization is defined as an individual who was admitted to a hospital in Chester County with a confirmed COVID-19 laboratory result. This individual may have been hospitalized for a reason other than COVID-19. Emergency Department (ED) visits and
hospitalizations (as defined above) are reasonable estimators of COVID-19 trends in the community. Data for Pennsylvania can be found on their COVID-19 Monthly Tracking Report.

Recent data showcases a small rise in ED visits and hospitalizations in October and November 2023, as evidenced by the trend in number of ED visits and hospitalizations, as well as the seven-day moving average of ED visits and hospitalizations, since June 1, 2023.
COVID-19 Estimate – Wastewater Surveillance

Another method for estimating COVID-19 trends in the community is by monitoring wastewater surveillance. Individuals infected with COVID-19, with or without symptoms, shed the SARS-CoV-2 virus in their feces. The Pennsylvania Department of Health measures the concentration of SARS-CoV-2 virus in wastewater samples from sewersheds throughout Pennsylvania. Data collected from wastewater provides insight about the presence of COVID-19 in the community and may serve as an early indication of an increase in cases. Chester County has two sample sites located within the county while another site is located nearby, in Delaware County.
In addition, a company called Biobot Analytics has become a leader in wastewater surveillance. Its methodologies for wastewater monitoring are different than that of the Pennsylvania Wastewater Surveillance System but can be used as a comparison. Since the beginning of November 2023, data show an increase in SARS-CoV-2 concentrations in sewersheds in Chester County and the United States.
Summary:

Since mandatory COVID-19 reporting was discontinued in May 2023, the Chester County Health Department is working to estimate COVID in the community using other indicators. Emergency Department visits, hospitalizations and results of wastewater surveillance can be used to estimate COVID-19. The data in this report suggest an increase of COVID-19 in the community as of November 2023. It is expected that COVID-19 cases will continue to increase throughout the winter due to the holiday season and people spending more time indoors.

Additional Resources:

1. COVID-19 Data for Pennsylvania – Pennsylvania Department of Health
2. Pennsylvania Wastewater Surveillance System – Pennsylvania Department of Health
3. COVID Data Tracker – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
4. COVID-19 Wastewater Surveillance – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
5. COVID-19 Wastewater Surveillance – Biobot Analytics