

UC Irvine

UC Irvine Previously Published Works

Title

Metagenomics of Wastewater Influent from Southern California Wastewater Treatment Facilities in the Era of COVID-19

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/90z0d5jx>

Journal

Microbiology Resource Announcements, 9(41)

ISSN

2576-098X

Authors

Rothman, Jason A
Loveless, Theresa B
Griffith, Madison L
[et al.](#)

Publication Date

2020-10-08

DOI

10.1128/mra.00907-20

Peer reviewed



Metagenomics of Wastewater Influent from Southern California Wastewater Treatment Facilities in the Era of COVID-19

 Jason A. Rothman,^a Theresa B. Loveless,^b Madison L. Griffith,^c Joshua A. Steele,^c John F. Griffith,^c  Katrine L. Whiteson^a

^aDepartment of Molecular Biology and Biochemistry, University of California, Irvine, Irvine, California, USA

^bDepartment of Biomedical Engineering, University of California, Irvine, Irvine, California, USA

^cSouthern California Coastal Water Research Project, Costa Mesa, California, USA

ABSTRACT Sequencing wastewater may be useful for detecting pathogens and assaying microbial water quality. We concentrated, extracted, and sequenced nucleic acids from 17 composite influent wastewater samples spanning seven southern California wastewater treatment facilities in May 2020. Bacteria were the most proportionally abundant taxonomic group present, followed by viruses and archaea.

Monitoring sewage provides population-level data on the diversity and spread of pathogens alongside clinical testing to assist in disease outbreak response (1–4). This approach may be able to determine the disease burden of a population, even when asymptomatic individuals are present (5). Likewise, the metagenomic sequencing of wastewater may also be useful in monitoring microbial water quality (6, 7) and the simultaneous detection of multiple pathogens.

Seventeen 24-hour composite wastewater influent samples were collected from seven locations across southern California during May 2020. In San Diego County, we collected samples from the South Bay Water Reclamation Plant (WRP), Hale Avenue Resource Recovery Facility, North City WRP, and Point Loma Wastewater Treatment Plant. In Los Angeles County, we collected samples from the San Jose Creek WRP, Hyperion WRP, and Joint Water Pollution Control Plant. We stored samples at 4°C for 0 to 40 days until extraction (Table 1).

We followed a viral nucleic acid concentration and extraction protocol based on Wu et al. (8). We pasteurized 42.5 ml of wastewater at 60°C for 90 min and then filtered samples with a 0.22- μ m filter (Corning, Corning, NY) into a tube containing 4.2 g polyethylene glycol 8000 (PEG-8000) and 0.95 g NaCl (Thermo Fisher, Waltham, MA). We then centrifuged the filtrate at 12,000 $\times g$ for 2 h at room temperature, aspirated off the supernatant, and centrifuged it again for 10 min. We removed the remaining supernatant and added 1.5 ml TRIzol (Thermo Fisher, Waltham, MA) to extract the nucleic acids, transferred the mixture to a 2-ml tube, and incubated it for 5 min at room temperature. We added 300 μ l chloroform, vortexed the mixture for 1 min, incubated it for 5 min at room temperature, and then centrifuged it at 12,000 $\times g$ for 15 min at 4°C. We moved the aqueous phase to a new tube and added 1 volume of 4°C isopropanol and then incubated it for 15 min at room temperature, centrifuged it at 12,000 $\times g$ for 10 min at 4°C, and then removed the supernatant. We washed the pellets with cold 75% ethanol and then centrifuged them at 12,000 $\times g$ for 3 min at 4°C, followed by another wash. We air-dried the RNA pellets for 10 min and then resuspended them in 30 μ l of RNase-free water and did not treat the RNA with DNase.

We generated cDNAs with SuperScript IV reverse transcriptase (Thermo Fisher, Waltham, MA) using the manufacturer's protocol on 10.5 μ l template RNA. All reaction mixtures included 40 units of recombinant human placenta RNase inhibitor (New

Citation Rothman JA, Loveless TB, Griffith ML, Steele JA, Griffith JF, Whiteson KL. 2020. Metagenomics of wastewater influent from southern California wastewater treatment facilities in the era of COVID-19. *Microbiol Resour Announc* 9:e00907-20. <https://doi.org/10.1128/MRA.00907-20>.

Editor Simon Roux, DOE Joint Genome Institute

Copyright © 2020 Rothman et al. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Address correspondence to Jason A. Rothman, rothmanj@uci.edu, or Katrine L. Whiteson, katrine@uci.edu.

Received 3 August 2020

Accepted 18 September 2020

Published 8 October 2020

TABLE 1 Descriptions of each sequenced sample^a

Sample name	Wastewater facility	SRA accession no.	Collection date	Days stored at 4°C before extraction	Latitude/longitude
Joint Water PCP 5.28.20-13	Joint Water PCP	SRR12352293	28 May 2020	13	33.801023 N, 118.284708 W
Hyperion 5.27.20-14	Hyperion WRP	SRR12352294	27 May 2020	14	33.925506 N, 118.430709 W
South Bay 5.28.20-13	South Bay WRP	SRR12352295	28 May 2020	13	32.543403 N, 117.067960 W
San Jose Creek 5.28.20-1	San Jose Creek WRP	SRR12352296	28 May 2020	1	34.033844 N, 118.023501 W
Joint Water PCP 5.28.20-1	Joint Water PCP	SRR12352297	28 May 2020	1	33.801023 N, 118.284708 W
Hyperion 5.28.20-1	Hyperion WRP	SRR12352298	28 May 2020	1	33.925506 N, 118.430709 W
Point Loma 5.29.20-0	Point Loma WTP	SRR12352299	29 May 2020	0	32.679592 N, 117.246719 W
Hyperion 5.28.20-13	Hyperion WRP	SRR12352300	28 May 2020	13	33.925506 N, 118.430709 W
North City 5.29.20-0	North City WRP	SRR12352301	29 May 2020	0	32.878986 N, 117.198984 W
North City 5.29.20-12	North City WRP	SRR12352302	29 May 2020	12	32.878986 N, 117.198984 W
Point Loma 5.27.20-14	Point Loma WTP	SRR12352303	27 May 2020	14	32.679592 N, 117.246719 W
South Bay 5.28.20-1	South Bay WRP	SRR12352304	28 May 2020	1	32.543403 N, 117.067960 W
Hale Ave 5.5.20-36	Hale Avenue RRF	SRR12352305	5 May 2020	36	33.105224 N, 117.113170 W
Hale Ave 5.1.20-40	Hale Avenue RRF	SRR12352306	1 May 2020	40	33.105224 N, 117.113170 W
Hale Ave 5.4.20-37	Hale Avenue RRF	SRR12352307	4 May 2020	37	33.105224 N, 117.113170 W
San Jose Creek 5.29.20-12	San Jose Creek WRP	SRR12352308	29 May 2020	12	34.033844 N, 118.023501 W
Point Loma 5.28.20-13	Point Loma WTP	SRR12352309	28 May 2020	13	32.679592 N, 117.246719 W

^a PCP, pollution control plant; WRP, water reclamation plant; WTP, water treatment plant; RRF, resource reclamation facility.

England BioLabs, Ipswich, MA). We shipped cDNAs to the Microbial Genome Sequencing Center (MiGS, Pittsburgh, PA), which handled library preparation and sequencing. MiGS prepared paired-end libraries with the Flex for Enrichment kit (Illumina, San Diego, CA) and then sequenced the libraries as 2 × 150-bp paired-end reads on an Illumina NextSeq 550 instrument. We used bbdduk (9) with default parameters for quality trimming and to remove artifacts and adapters. We assigned taxonomy to reads with Kraken 2 (10), removed human contamination, and visualized the data with ggplot2 (11) in R (12).

We received 45,415,020 total reads (mean, 2.67 million; range, 2.2 to 2.96 million), an average of 33.8% of which were classified by Kraken 2 (range, 9.1 to 43.3%). Of the classified reads, an average of 97.2% were bacterial (range, 86.1 to 99.2%), 0.08% were archaeal (range, 0.02 to 0.26%), and 2.6% were viral (range, 0.65 to 13.4%) (Fig. 1). We found viruses commonly present in wastewater, including CrAssphage (7) and *Pepper mild mottle virus* (6) and, in low abundance, norovirus (13). As we sequenced several

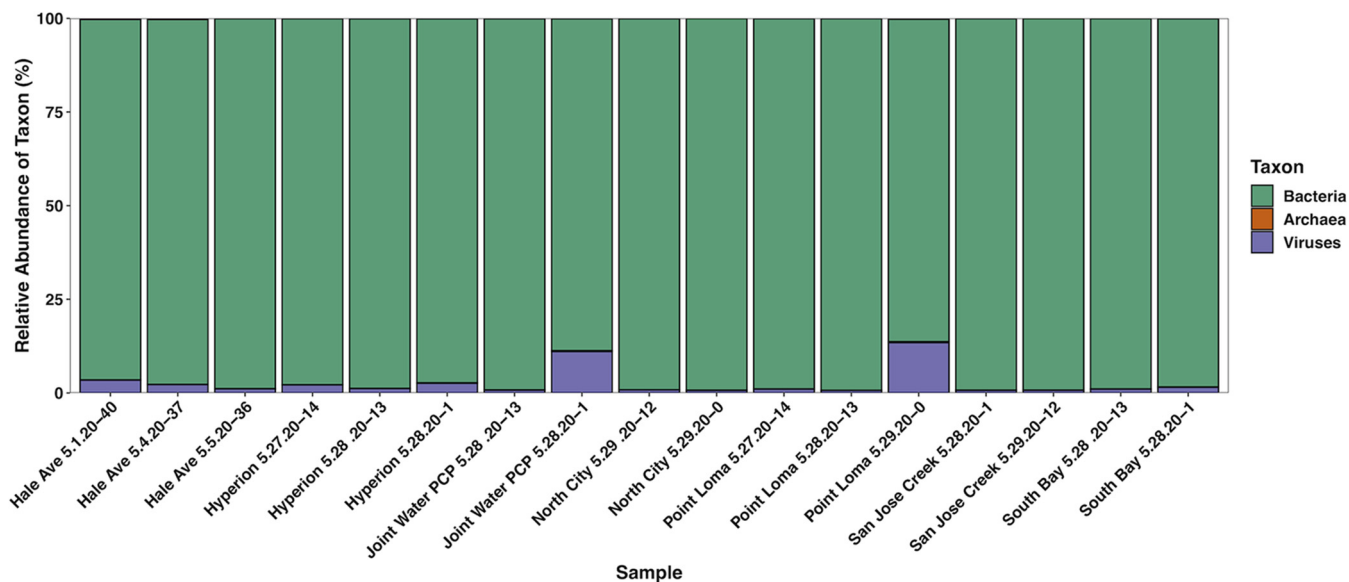


FIG 1 Stacked bar plot indicating the relative abundances of taxa in each sample. The color denotes the taxon, and sample names contain information about each sample, including facility name, sampling date, and number of days stored at 4°C.

bacteriophages with DNA-based genomes, there was likely DNA contamination in our RNA extractions. Interestingly, we detected very few reads of viruses in the family *Coronaviridae*, possibly due to low sequencing depth, storage time, or extraction method (4).

Data availability. The raw metagenomic sequence data are available in the NCBI Sequence Read Archive under BioProject number [PRJNA649747](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/bioproject/PRJNA649747).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project was funded through the Emergency COVID-19 Research Seed Funding program through the University of California Office of the President Research Grants Program office (proposal number R00RG2814) awarded to K.L.W., J.A.R., and T.B.L.

REFERENCES

1. Sims N, Kasprzyk-Hordern B. 2020. Future perspectives of wastewater-based epidemiology: monitoring infectious disease spread and resistance to the community level. *Environ Int* 139:105689. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envint.2020.105689>.
2. Wigginton KR, Ye Y, Ellenberg RM. 2015. Emerging investigators series: the source and fate of pandemic viruses in the urban water cycle. *Environ Sci: Water Res Technol* 1:735–746. <https://doi.org/10.1039/C5EW00125K>.
3. Hellmér M, Paxéus N, Magnius L, Enache L, Arnholm B, Johansson A, Bergström T, Norder H. 2014. Detection of pathogenic viruses in sewage provided early warnings of hepatitis A virus and norovirus outbreaks. *Appl Environ Microbiol* 80:6771–6781. <https://doi.org/10.1128/AEM.01981-14>.
4. Wu F, Xiao A, Zhang J, Moniz K, Endo N, Armas F, Bonneau R, Brown MA, Bushman M, Chai PR, Duvallet C, Erickson TB, Foppe K, Ghaeli N, Gu X, Hanage WP, Huang KH, Lee WL, Matus M, McElroy KA, Nagler J, Rhode SF, Santillana M, Tucker JA, Wuertz S, Zhao S, Thompson J, Alm EJ. 2020. SARS-CoV-2 titers in wastewater foreshadow dynamics and clinical presentation of new COVID-19 cases. *medRxiv* <https://doi.org/10.1101/2020.06.15.20117747>.
5. Manor Y, Handsher R, Halmut T, Neuman M, Bobrov A, Rudich H, Vonsover A, Shulman L, Kew O, Mendelson E. 1999. Detection of poliovirus circulation by environmental surveillance in the absence of clinical cases in Israel and the Palestinian Authority. *J Clin Microbiol* 37: 1670–1675. <https://doi.org/10.1128/JCM.37.6.1670-1675.1999>.
6. Kitajima M, Sassi HP, Torrey JR. 2018. Pepper mild mottle virus as a water quality indicator. *NPJ Clean Water* 1:19. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41545-018-0019-5>.
7. Farkas K, Adriaenssens EM, Walker DI, McDonald JE, Malham SK, Jones DL. 2019. Critical evaluation of CrAssphage as a molecular marker for human-derived wastewater contamination in the aquatic environment. *Food Environ Virol* 11:113–119. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12560-019-09369-1>.
8. Wu F, Zhang J, Xiao A, Gu X, Lee WL, Armas F, Kauffman K, Hanage W, Matus M, Ghaeli N, Endo N, Duvallet C, Poyet M, Moniz K, Washburne AD, Erickson TB, Chai PR, Thompson J, Alm EJ. 2020. SARS-CoV-2 titers in wastewater are higher than expected from clinically confirmed cases. *mSystems* 5:e00614-20. <https://doi.org/10.1128/mSystems.00614-20>.
9. Bushnell B. 2014. BBTools software package 37.50. <http://bibttools.jgi.doe.gov>.
10. Wood DE, Lu J, Langmead B. 2019. Improved metagenomic analysis with Kraken 2. *Genome Biol* 20:257. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13059-019-1891-0>.
11. Wickham H. 2009. ggplot2: elegant graphics for data analysis. Springer-Verlag, New York, NY.
12. R Core Team. 2018. R: a language and environment for statistical computing. Vienna, Austria. <https://www.R-project.org>.
13. Flannery J, Keaveney S, Rajko-Nenow P, O'Flaherty V, Doré W. 2012. Concentration of norovirus during wastewater treatment and its impact on oyster contamination. *Appl Environ Microbiol* 78:3400–3406. <https://doi.org/10.1128/AEM.07569-11>.