

Hantavirus Cruise Outbreak Contained Pandemic Risk Low



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A deadly hantavirus outbreak aboard the cruise ship Hondius has killed three people and infected eight passengers, but global health authorities say the risk of a pandemic remains very low. The vessel, operated by Oceanwide Expeditions, was scheduled to anchor off Spain's Canary Islands after departing Argentina on April 1 with more than 140 passengers and crew from 23 countries.

Six laboratory-confirmed cases involve Andes virus, a rodent-borne hantavirus endemic in South America and the only known strain capable of limited human-to-human transmission. Health officials said infections likely occurred during the voyage, which included stops at Saint Helena where passengers disembarked, complicating tracing efforts across multiple countries.

The World Health Organization (WHO) said the outbreak is serious but not a global threat.

Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus described the situation as “contained risk,” while WHO experts emphasized it is “not the start of a pandemic” and “not COVID.”

Investigators believe a Dutch couple may have contracted the virus before boarding in Argentina after possible rodent exposure in Ushuaia. One passenger died onboard, another during evacuation, and a third later developed symptoms and died on May 2.

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) said the virus does not spread easily between humans and confirmed the risk to the wider population remains very low. WHO has activated international coordination and issued travel guidance. Treatment remains supportive, with no vaccine available and a high fatality rate in severe cases.