22 May 2026

Hantavirus cruise ship outbreak

WHO and UKHSA are monitoring a hantavirus outbreak linked to a cruise ship, with the risk to the UK public currently assessed as very low

On 2 May 2026, a group of passengers with severe respiratory illness on a cruise ship was reported to the World Health Organization (WHO). On 4 May 2026, WHO reported that a total of seven (two confirmed and five suspected) cases of hantavirus, a rare but severe infection, had been identified among the 88 passengers and 59 crew members aboard this cruise ship, including three deaths [1].

Symptoms were first reported between 6 and 28 April 2026 and included fever, gastrointestinal (gut) problems, followed by a rapid development to pneumonia, acute respiratory distress syndrome and shock [1].

As of 18 May 2026, WHO reported there are a total of 11 hantavirus cases (nine confirmed, two probable) linked to this cruise. The cruise ship arrived back in the Netherlands on 18 May where it will undergo full cleaning and disinfection [2].

Further updates on case numbers will be reported on the Outbreak Surveillance page.

Confirmed and probable cases are now being treated and isolated in a number of countries including France, Netherlands, South Africa, Switzerland and USA [3].

WHO have confirmed the type of virus in this outbreak is Andes hantavirus [3]. People usually become infected by breathing in air contaminated with virus particles from rodent urine, droppings, or saliva. The virus can also enter the body through cuts, the eyes or very rarely, a rodent bite [4]. Most hantaviruses do not spread between humans, although person-to-person transmission has happened with the Andes virus strain via very close contact [1].

WHO is coordinating an international response, including in-depth investigations, case isolation and care, medical evacuation and laboratory investigations. WHO currently assesses risk to the global population from this event as low and continues to monitor this outbreak. Updates will be available as the situation develops [1].

A number of British nationals were onboard this ship [4, 5] which left Ushuaia, Argentina at the beginning of April 2026 and travelled across the South Atlantic. This included stops in mainland Antarctica, South Georgia, Nightingale Island, Tristan da Cunha, Saint Helena and Ascension Island [1]. The ship then arrived in waters off Cape Verde on 3 May 2026 where three suspected cases were evacuated to the Netherlands for treatment. From here the ship continued to Tenerife, arriving on the 10 May, where the remaining passengers were repatriated to various countries for monitoring and isolation [5].

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) is monitoring and providing expertise and public health advice. UKHSA are working closely with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), WHO, the UK Devolved Administrations and international health partners to support the response [4, 5]. Updates regarding British nationals affected are provided by UKHSA update on the hantavirus cruise ship outbreak – GOV.UK.

Although hantavirus is a serious infection, risk for the UK population is very low [4, 5].

No additional precautions are necessary for the UK public [4].

More information is available from the UKHSA here: What is hantavirus? How is it transmitted and what are the symptoms?

Further WHO advice is available here: Hantavirus.

Resources

- European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control: Suspected hantavirus outbreak on cruise ship under investigation: risk for Europeans very low
- Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha. Warnings and insurance. Hantavirus
- World Health Organization: Hantavirus outbreak toolbox
- UK Health Security Agency: What you need to know about the hantavirus outbreak linked to the Dutch cruise ship

References

1. World Health Organization. Disease Outbreak News. Hantavirus cluster linked to cruise ship travel, Multi-country. 4 May 2026. [Accessed 22 May 2026]
2. World Health Organization. WHO's response to hantavirus cases linked to a cruise ship. [Accessed 22 May 2026]
3. World Health Organization. Disease Outbreak News. Hantavirus cluster linked to cruise ship travel, Multi-country. 8 May 2026 [Accessed 22 May 2026]
4. UK Health Security Agency. What is hantavirus? How is it transmitted and what are the symptoms? 5 May 2026. [Accessed 22 May 2026]
5. UK Health Security Agency. UKHSA Update on hantavirus cruise ship outbreak UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA)and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). 18 May 2026. [Accessed 22 May 2026]