

# Hantavirus ship evacuees begin returning home

No vaccines or specific treatments exist for hantavirus

● Health officials have stressed that the risk for global public health is low

● Hantavirus type that is transmissible between humans -- the Andes virus -- has been confirmed among those who have tested positive

AFP | Granadilla De Abona, Spain

Occupants of a cruise ship struck by a deadly hantavirus outbreak that has sparked international alarm began arriving home from Spain's Canary Islands yesterday in a complex repatriation operation.

Three passengers from the MV Hondius -- a Dutch husband and wife and a German woman -- have died, while others have fallen sick with the rare disease, which usually spreads among rodents.

No vaccines or specific treatments exist for hantavirus, which is endemic in Argentina, where the ship departed in April.

But health officials have

## Greek from hantavirus-hit ship to be quarantined: ministry

Athens, Greece

A Greek man on board a cruise ship struck by a deadly hantavirus outbreak that has sparked international alarm will be quarantined for 45 days, the Greek health ministry said Sunday.

The ministry in a statement said the man would be put on a special Greek airforce flight upon being evacuated from the MV Hondius on Sunday.



A British citizen boards a plane bound for the UK carrying passengers evacuated from the Dutch flagged hantavirus-stricken cruise ship MV Hondius at the Tenerife Sur-Reina Sofia airport on the island of Tenerife in Spain's Canary Islands

## "This is not COVID"

AFP | Washington, United States

American passengers evacuated from a cruise ship struck by a deadly hantavirus outbreak will not necessarily be quarantined, a top US health official said yesterday.

Jay Bhattacharya, acting director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), also urged the US public to remain calm about the hantavirus, saying: "This is not Covid."

The United States announced Friday that it would organize a repatriation flight for the 17 Americans aboard the MV Hondius, where three passengers have died and others have fallen sick. The ship has arrived in Spain's Canary Islands.

The US passengers, all of whom are asymptomatic,

will be taken to a specialized center in the rural state of Nebraska, but will not necessarily be quarantined there, Bhattacharya told CNN's "State of the Union" news program on Sunday.

"We're going to interview them and assess them for risk... if they have been in close contact with somebody who was symptomatic," he said.

Following this assessment and depending on the estimated risk, passengers will be allowed "to stay in Nebraska if they'd like, or if they want to go back home, and their home situation allows it, to safely drive them home without exposing other people on the way," Bhattacharya added.

In either case, passengers will remain under observation for several weeks by health authorities to ensure they do not develop symptoms, he said, as happened with seven other

Americans who left the ship earlier in the journey.

According to the CDC, "people are generally only contagious when they exhibit symptoms."

Bhattacharya said the same protocol was followed during a 2018 outbreak "of this exact strain of the hantavirus," which was successfully contained.

Responding to criticism that there has been limited communication from US health authorities about the hantavirus risk -- six years after the Covid-19 pandemic -- he said the situations were not comparable.

"If the threat level were higher, then we would have obviously reacted differently," Bhattacharya said.

"This is not COVID," he said. "We shouldn't be panicking when the evidence doesn't warrant it."

stressed that the risk for global public health is low and played down comparisons to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Spanish Health Minister Monica Garcia said the evacuation of most of the ship's nearly 150

passengers and crew would continue until a final repatriation flight to Australia on Monday.

Passengers wearing blue medical suits began disembarking the Dutch-flagged vessel onto smaller boats to reach the port

of Granadilla on Tenerife, AFP journalists saw.

The evacuees then boarded a red Spanish army bus and travelled to Tenerife South airport in a convoy, with a protective board separating the driver from

### HANTAVIRUS

A RARE BUT SERIOUS VIRAL INFECTION

Hantaviruses are a group of viruses spread by rodents. They can cause a rare but potentially life-threatening disease in humans.

- 1. WHAT IS HANTAVIRUS?**
  - Hantaviruses are zoonotic viruses, meaning they spread between animals and humans.
  - Different kinds of hantaviruses exist around the world. The Sin Nombre virus is the most common in the Americas.
- 2. HOW DOES IT SPREAD?**
  - Humans get infected mainly by inhaling particles contaminated with rodent urine, droppings, or saliva.
  - Inhaling contaminated dust in closed or poorly ventilated areas (barns, cabins, tents).
  - Disturbing rodent droppings, urine, or nesting materials.
  - Contact with rodents or surfaces contaminated by them.
  - The virus enters the body through the nose, mouth, or eyes.
- 3. SYMPTOMS**
  - Symptoms usually appear 1-5 weeks after exposure.
  - Early symptoms (similar to the flu):
    - Fever
    - Headache
    - Muscle aches
    - Fatigue
    - Nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain
    - Chills
  - Severe cases can progress to:
    - Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) (rarely in the Americas)
    - or Hemorrhagic Fever with Renal Syndrome (HFRS) (mainly in Asia and Europe)
- 4. POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS**
  - HANTAVIRUS PULMONARY SYNDROME (HPS)**
    - Can develop quickly and is fatal. Affects the lungs.
    - Shortness of breath
    - Fluid in the lungs
    - Low blood pressure
    - Respiratory failure
    - Fatality rate: ~38-40% (varies by region and medical care)
  - HEMORRHAGIC FEVER WITH RENAL SYNDROME (HFRS)**
    - Affects blood vessels and kidneys.
    - Kidney dysfunction
    - Bleeding
    - Low blood pressure
    - Fatality rate: ~1-15% (varies by region and medical care)
- 5. PREVENTION**
  - Prevent rodent entry: seal holes, gaps, and openings.
  - Store food in rodent-proof containers.
  - Clean up safely: do not sweep or vacuum rodent droppings. Disinfect with a bleach solution (1½ cups of bleach per gallon of water). Let sit for 5 minutes, then wipe up.
  - Ventilate closed areas (open doors/windows for at least 30 minutes) before entering.
  - Wear gloves and a mask when cleaning areas with rodent activity.
- 6. WHAT TO DO**
  - Seek medical care immediately if you develop flu-like symptoms after being in an area with rodent activity.
  - There is no specific antiviral treatment for hantavirus. Early supportive care in a hospital is critical.
  - Report suspected cases to your local health authorities.
- 7. KEY FACTS**
  - Hantaviruses are found worldwide, especially in rural areas.
  - Rodents don't look sick, but can carry and spread the virus year-round.
  - Human-to-human spread is very rare.
  - Prevention and early medical care can save lives.

Hantavirus infections are rare, but awareness and preventive measures can reduce risk. Stay informed. Stay safe.

Source: CDC, WHO, HPA

the passengers. The evacuees changed into new protective equipment before boarding their repatriation flights, the first of which took 14 Spaniards to Madrid, where they will observe quarantine at a military hospital.

"Everything is going well," French evacuee Roland Seitre told AFP just before taking off, saying "everyone was great" during the disembarkation.

A plane bound for the Netherlands was taking 27 people, including Belgian, Greek, German, Guatemalan and Argentine citizens, Spanish civil protection chief Virginia Barcones told public broadcaster RTVE.

Separate flights for Turkish, British, Irish and US citizens were also planned for Sunday.

Canary Islands authorities have warned that the operation must be completed by Monday,

when adverse weather conditions will force the ship to leave.

"If everything continues according to plan... at 19:00 the ship will set sail for the Netherlands" on Monday, Barcones said.



The WHO believes the first infection occurred before the start of the expedition, followed by transmission between humans onboard the vessel.

## UK army in 'daring' island parachute op to aid suspected Hantavirus patient

● The urgent response came after confirmation by the UK Health Security Agency

AFP | London, United Kingdom

British military personnel carried out an airborne operation to deliver urgent medical support for a suspected Hantavirus patient on a South Atlantic island, ministers said on Sunday.



An army specialist team parachuted onto the island of Tristan da Cunha, Britain's most remote overseas territory, a defence ministry statement said.

One of three British nationals diagnosed with suspected hantavirus linked to the outbreak on the MV Hondius cruise ship is on the island.

UK Armed Forces pose with a Union flag after taking part in an air drop to the Atlantic Island of Tristan Da Cunha to provide assistance to a British National who contracted hantavirus aboard an Atlantic expedition cruise ship, MV Hondius.

The team of six paratroopers and two military clinicians, all from the 16 Air Assault Brigade, descended from a Royal Air Force (RAF) A400M transport aircraft "in a daring parachute drop", the statement said.

Vital oxygen supplies and other medical aid were air-dropped almost simultaneously.

The urgent response came after confirmation by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) on Friday of a suspected infection in a British national on the island.

Tristan da Cunha, a group

of volcanic islands with a population of around 220 has no airstrip and is accessible only by boat.

With oxygen supplies at critically low levels, officials said an airdrop was the only viable option to deliver care in time and support the island's two-person medical team.

Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper paid tribute to the armed forces for an "extraordinary operation".

The drop involved a long-range flight of nearly 6,800 kilometres (4,200 miles) from RAF

Brize Norton in central England to Ascension Island, followed by a further 3,000-kilometre flight to Tristan da Cunha, the statement said.

Armed Forces Minister Al Carns said the operation had been carried out in "incredibly challenging circumstances"... with the utmost professionalism and composure under pressure".

The two other British nationals involved in the hantavirus cruise ship outbreak were earlier evacuated to the Netherlands and South Africa.