



ASEAN BIOLOGICAL THREATS SURVEILLANCE CENTRE

DISEASE ALERT



Korea Disease Control and
Prevention Agency



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**First alert : May 6, 2026 | Hantavirus cluster linked to cruise ship travel,
Multi-country**

Sub-Locations Affected

Multi-country: Atlantic Ocean (Cruise ship), South Africa, Saint Helena, Cape Verde.

Event Description

On May 2, 2026, the World Health Organization (WHO) was notified of a cluster of severe respiratory illnesses among passengers on a cruise ship carrying 147 individuals. As of May 4, seven cases have been identified, including three deaths. The ship, which departed Ushuaia, Argentina, on April 1, is currently moored off the coast of Cape Verde while international health teams conduct investigations and medical evaluations.

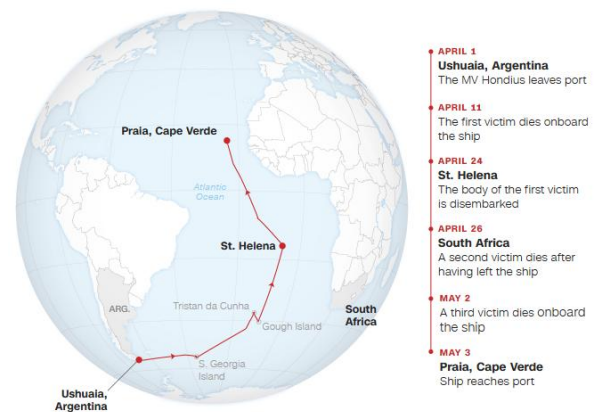


Figure 1. Route of the cruise ship across the South Atlantic in relation to the hantavirus cluster

Epidemiological Information

- On April 1, 2026, a ship carrying 147 individuals (88 passengers and 59 crew) from 23 nationalities departed Ushuaia and made multiple stops across South Atlantic islands before mooring off Cape Verde.
- Between April 6 and 28, 2026, illness onset occurred among multiple individuals, characterized by fever and gastrointestinal symptoms with rapid progression to pneumonia, acute respiratory distress syndrome, and shock; further investigations are ongoing.
 - **Case 1:** An adult male developed fever, headache, and mild diarrhoea on April 6, 2026 while on board, progressed to respiratory distress by April 11, and died the same day. No microbiological testing was performed. The body was removed from the ship to Saint Helena (a British Overseas Territory) on April 24.

- **Case 2:** An adult female, a close contact of case 1, disembarked in Saint Helena on April 24, with gastrointestinal symptoms. She deteriorated during a flight to Johannesburg, South Africa, on April 25, and died on April 26 upon arrival at the emergency department. On May 4, hantavirus infection was confirmed by PCR.

Both cases 1 and 2, had travelled in South America, including Argentina, before they boarded the cruise ship on April 1.

- **Case 3:** An adult male presented on April 24 with fever, dyspnoea, and pneumonia, worsened on April 26, and was medically evacuated to South Africa on April 27. He remains in ICU, with PCR confirmation of hantavirus on May 2.
- **Case 4:** An adult female developed illness on April 28 and died on May 2.
- As of May 4, 2026, seven cases have been reported aboard, including two laboratory-confirmed hantavirus infections, five suspected cases, and three deaths. Three suspected cases remain on board with fever and gastrointestinal symptoms, under evaluation in Cape Verde. No additional symptomatic cases have been reported on board at this time.
- Hantavirus infection is typically zoonotic, transmitted through contact with infected rodent excreta. However, limited human-to-human transmission has been documented in previous outbreaks of the Andes virus strain. Health officials are investigating whether this cluster resulted from a shared environmental exposure during remote shore excursions or direct person-to-person spread.

Response Measures

- Affected passengers are under isolation or have been medically evacuated, with a coordinated international response including contact tracing for flight passengers linked to Case 2, laboratory sequencing in South Africa, and active symptom monitoring for all crew and passengers for a 45-day period.
- Spain has agreed to receive the ship in the Canary Islands, following requests from WHO and the European Union. Epidemiologists will conduct screening, disinfection, and risk assessment prior to repatriation, with arrival expected within three to four days.
- Contact tracing is ongoing for 82 passengers and six crew members from the April 25 flight between Saint Helena and Johannesburg, during which Case 2 was transported.
- Medical teams from Cape Verde are providing support on board. Appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), in anticipation of possible human-to-human transmission, is available for healthcare workers and on the ship. Additional tracing is under assessment for earlier disembarkation points before the ship reached the coast of Cape Verde.
- Passengers have been instructed to remain in cabins during disinfection and control measures.

Recommendations

- **The WHO assesses the overall public health risk as low**, with no evidence of sustained transmission, and does not recommend travel or trade restrictions while investigations continue, and recommends:
 - Strengthen coordinated public health response, including detection, investigation, reporting, case management, IPC measures, and ship sanitation in collaboration with operators.
 - Early detection and clinical management: ensure prompt recognition, isolation, and referral of severe cases to higher-level care (e.g., ICU), with supportive treatment as the mainstay; no specific antiviral is approved, and antibiotics are only used when bacterial infection is suspected.
 - Onboard and community-level preventive measures implementation: maintain strict hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, mask use for symptomatic individuals, 45-day symptom monitoring, self-isolation when ill, and adequate environmental cleaning (avoiding dry sweeping) and ventilation.
 - Increasing vigilance among travellers, crew, and personnel in endemic or eco-tourism settings, with attention to potential exposure risks.

Sources:

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2. CNN (2026, May 5) *Three people to be evacuated from hantavirus-hit cruise ship in coming hours*, CNN. Retrieved May 4, 2026 from <https://edition.cnn.com/2026/05/05/africa/cruise-ship-hantavirus-who-intl>
3. Biothreats Emergence, Analysis, and Communications Networks (BEACON) (2026, May 5) *Follow-up on hantavirus outbreak linked to cruise ship travel: limited human-to-human transmission likely; virus sequencing results pending; medical evacuations of sick crew members planned; Spain to receive ship in Canary Islands*, BEACON. Retrieved May 6, 2026 from <https://beaconbio.org/en/report/?reportid=42456689-25ba-4586-9374-84f420cd2d9e&eventid=5fd6edf4-ca36-4761-8dc8-cb8632a43977>