

Public health management of communicable diseases on cruise vessels in Tasmania

January 2024

Background and legislation

Cruise ships are a high-risk setting for transmission of communicable diseases. High numbers of people mix in relatively closed spaces, over a longer duration than most other forms of transport. Acute respiratory infections (ARI) and gastroenteritis are the communicable diseases most often associated with cruise vessel outbreaks.

International vessels arriving in Australia are subject [The Biosecurity Act 2015 - DAFF](#), which outlines requirements for reporting of Human Listed Diseases (HLD)

International vessels are required to submit a Pre-Arrival Report (PAR), reporting any crew and passengers showing symptoms of infectious disease and any death on board, through the Maritime and Aircraft Reporting System (MARS) within 96-12 hours of arrival into their first port of arrival. Additional information and submission details are available on the [Australian Government Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry website](#).

Under the Tasmanian *Public Health Act* (1997) the Director of Public Health has the powers to manage cases and contacts of notifiable diseases while vessels are in Tasmania.

Scope and purpose of this document

- To describe the roles and responsibilities of cruise vessel operators and Public Health Services Tasmania in managing communicable disease outbreaks on cruise vessels operating in Tasmania.
- To outline the reporting and communication expectations for cruise vessels operating in Tasmania.

Roles and responsibilities

Cruise operators are responsible for:

- Maintaining plans for managing communicable diseases on board vessels based on industry best practice guidance to minimise transmission of disease
- Maintaining an accurate manifest that includes personal contact details (email and phone numbers) for contacting all passengers and disembarking crew if necessary
- Providing this information within four hours to Public Health Services Tasmania when requested
- Retaining this information for a minimum of 30 days
- Having processes to document key metrics for communicable diseases on board (including diagnosis, symptoms, and date of onset), and to inform Public Health Services if required
- Notifying relevant authorities of potential Listed Human Diseases on board
- Notifying Public Health Services Tasmania of an outbreak of a communicable disease in accordance with the criteria in Table 1 below, or at any time public health advice is requested.

Public Health Service Tasmania are responsible for:

- Supporting cruise operators to manage outbreaks of communicable diseases on board where assistance is requested or defined thresholds are met
- Working collaboratively with all stakeholders and agencies to support outbreak management while vessels are in Tasmania waters
- Working with industry to ensure awareness of local reporting and operational requirements.

Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry are responsible for:

- Continuing to manage the pre-arrival reporting and pratique processes for international vessels arriving at their first port of entry in Australia.

Communicable disease cases and outbreak management onboard

- Operators should maintain outbreak management protocols based on industry best practice guidelines as outlined in the [AHPPC statement to support safe cruising](#).
- Disease specific national guidelines are available on the [CDNA Series of National Guidelines](#).
- The sections below outline pre-departure measures, onboard surveillance, and case and outbreak management recommendations to mitigate risk.

Pre-departure measures

Cruise operators are recommended to consider pre-departure processes to mitigate risk including:

- Encouraging passengers and crew to stay up to date with COVID-19 and influenza
- Managing staff health including maintaining records of staff vaccination status,
- Considering risk-based screening processes before embarkation,
- Where cases or contacts are identified before boarding, undertaking a risk assessment to determine whether boarding is appropriate with suitable risk mitigation strategies in place.

On board surveillance:

- Monitoring communicable diseases on board to identify linked cases and outbreaks,
- Documenting key metrics for communicable diseases on board, including diagnosis, symptoms, and date of onset, and informing Public Health Services if required.

Case and outbreak management:

- Maintain and follow plans to promptly identify and control outbreaks of communicable diseases
- Any individual on board who develops symptoms of acute respiratory symptoms or gastroenteritis should be recommended and supported to self-isolate and be enabled to seek testing and medical care
- Any individual on board with acute respiratory symptoms should be encouraged and supported to remain in their cabin while symptomatic, and if leaving their cabin should wear a mask and avoid crowded spaces
- Support COVID-19 close contacts to be managed in line with the COVID-19 National Guidelines for Public Health Units, including wearing a mask outside the cabin,

- Communicate regularly to passengers about communicable diseases on board and how to prevent further spread, with messaging before shore excursions to mitigate the risk of spread to onshore communities,
- Provide access to hand sanitation, and appropriate testing, management and support for passengers and crew with communicable diseases.

Reporting:

- For cruise vessels entering or in Tasmanian waters, reporting provides Public Health Services with awareness of communicable disease outbreaks on board and informs an assessment of the need for clinical and/or public health support, and any risk to Tasmanian communities.
- Reports should be sent 12 to 24 hours before arrival in Tasmania if a vessel is at Level 2, and at any time while in Tasmania when the on board situation progresses to higher risk as per Table 1.
- Aggregate data should include data on cases in both crew and passengers, for all cases diagnosed in the past 21 days or voyage duration (whichever is shorter). Cruise operators should also contact Public Health Services for any concerns regarding communicable diseases (eg outbreaks of illness of unknown cause, high rates of severe disease/requirements for medical evacuation, and/or operational compromise due to illness in crew) regardless of the criteria in Table 1 being met.

Table 1:

On board scenarios and reporting requirements for COVID-19, acute respiratory illness, acute gastroenteritis or other notifiable diseases.

	On board scenario		Reporting action	
	On board scenario/ outbreak threshold (21-day attack rate)	Operational impacts	Timing and contact method	Reporting required
Level 1	0 to <3% on board affected by acute respiratory infections or acute gastroenteritis	Minimal impacts on staffing, vessel able to provide medical care.	Only required for voyages ending in Tasmania. 12-24 hours prior to a voyage ending at a Tasmania port. Email Communicable Disease Prevention Unit at cdpuoncall@health.tas.gov.au	Cruise Vessel Routine Reporting Table
Level 2	3% or more on board affected by acute respiratory infections or acute gastroenteritis.	Moderate to severe impacts on operations Vessel may be unable to provide medical care.	On entering Tasmanian waters where Level 2 has been reported in the previous jurisdiction and maintained on entering Tasmania. On transition to Level 2 if in Tasmanian waters. Email Communicable Disease Prevention Unit at cdpuoncall@health.tas.gov.au and telephone 03 6166 0655. This number is diverted to an after-hours mobile.	Cruise Vessel Routine Reporting Table. Additional details including line-listed data may be requested by Public Health to support response.

Please contact the Public Health Communicable Disease Prevention Unit to request a copy of the Reporting Template: email cdpuoncall@health.tas.gov.au or phone 03 6166 0655.