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CDC Tracks 148-Case Gastrointestinal Outbreak Aboard Caribbean Princess Pending Pathogen Lab Results

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The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Vessel Sanitation Program (VSP) is monitoring an acute gastrointestinal illness outbreak aboard Princess Cruises' Caribbean Princess that has sickened 148 people during a 12-night voyage to the Caribbean, Colombia, and the Panama Canal. Having departed Fort Lauderdale, Florida, on November 11, 2026, and scheduled to return on November 23, the ship reported 134 ill passengers out of 2,936 onboard (roughly 4.6 percent) alongside 14 ill crew members out of 1,132 (roughly 1.2 percent), with predominant symptoms of vomiting and diarrhea.

Because the causative pathogen is currently listed as unknown by the CDC, onboard medical staff collected stool specimens for laboratory testing to identify the specific viral or bacterial agent. In the meantime, the ship enacted standard maritime outbreak protocols, including isolating sick travelers and suspending self-service buffet stations.

What CDC Vessel Sanitation Telemetry Shows

Under U.S. public health rules, passenger vessels carrying 13 or more passengers on international itineraries calling at U.S. ports must notify the CDC whenever gastrointestinal illness affects 2 percent or more of passengers or crew, and the VSP posts public outbreak notices once cases reach 3 percent or higher. With roughly 4.6 percent of passengers and 1.2 percent of crew reporting acute vomiting or diarrhea, the Caribbean Princess sailing crossed the public reporting threshold mid-voyage.

While awaiting diagnostic confirmation, maritime epidemiologists routinely test stool samples for common enteric pathogens -- including norovirus, enterotoxigenic or Shiga toxin-producing Escherichia coli , and Salmonella -- using multiplex molecular panels that distinguish viral from bacterial gastroenteritis.

| Outbreak Metric | | Reported Caribbean Princess Record | | Public Health Context |

| Voyage & Dates | | 12-night Fort Lauderdale roundtrip (Nov. 11-23, 2026) | | Caribbean, Colombia, & Panama Canal itinerary |

| Affected Passengers | | 134 of 2,936 onboard (~4.6%) | | Exceeds CDC VSP 3% public outbreak threshold |

| Affected Crew | | 14 of 1,132 onboard (~1.2%) | | Tracked separately to protect galley & housekeeping |

| Primary Symptoms & Agent | | Vomiting & diarrhea; pathogen pending lab confirmation | | Stool samples collected for diagnostic testing |

Why Shipboard Environments Require Rapid Containment

Cruise ships bring thousands of passengers and crew together in shared dining rooms, theaters, elevators, and cabins for days at a time, creating dense contact networks where gastrointestinal pathogens can spread quickly. Even a small number of infected travelers boarding with mild or early-stage symptoms can contaminate high-touch surfaces such as handrails, elevator buttons, and serving utensils.

To break transmission chains before the ship returns to Fort Lauderdale, Princess Cruises implemented enhanced cleaning and disinfection protocols, isolated symptomatic passengers and crew, and suspended self-service options at shipboard buffets so crew members serve food directly. Crew surveillance is especially important because food handlers and cabin stewards interact with large numbers of guests.

Practical Prevention Until Lab Results Return

Until stool-sample testing identifies the exact pathogen behind the Caribbean Princess cluster, public health guidance emphasizes thorough handwashing with soap and water rather than relying solely on alcohol-based hand sanitizers -- because non-enveloped enteric viruses such as norovirus resist alcohol rubs far better than enveloped respiratory viruses. Prompt reporting of symptoms to shipboard medical centers also helps crews isolate cases early and keep outbreaks from cascading across multi-week sailings.

References & Primary Sources

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