

HANTAVIRUS LINKED TO MV HONDIUS – FAQ

Hantavirus – what you should know	
What is hantavirus?	Hantaviruses are a group of viruses carried by rodents (like mice and rats). They can cause serious illnesses in people, including fatalities. People with underlying health conditions may be at a higher risk of poor outcomes.
How do people get hantavirus?	People usually become infected when they breathe in air contaminated with virus particles from rodent urine, droppings (faeces), or saliva. It can also happen if these materials get into cuts or eyes, or rarely through rodent bites.
Can hantaviruses spread from person to person?	Most hantaviruses are not spread between people. They are spread by contact with rodents and their waste. However, the specific hantavirus affecting at least one of the passengers aboard the MV Hondius has now been identified as the Andes virus. This specific hantavirus is found in South America and has been documented to spread between people in close household or intimate contact in rare outbreaks.
What are the symptoms of hantavirus infection?	Symptoms can vary but include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fatigue, fever, muscle aches • Headache, dizziness, chills • Nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain • Later: coughing and difficulty breathing
How long is it before symptoms appear?	About 1–8 weeks can pass between exposure to the virus and developing symptoms.
What is the recovery time?	It may take several weeks to fully recover.
Should people worry about casual contact?	No. Everyday social contact (like walking in public spaces, shops, workplaces, or schools) is not a known risk for spreading hantavirus. Close and prolonged contact with a person suffering from hantavirus is the main risk observed in rare human-to-human spread.



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	<p>People entering a shared space, such as boarding the MV Hondius for a period of a few hours, are at a low risk. Those persons visiting the MV Hondius whilst on the island will receive written information once identified.</p>
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St Helena specific medical advice and intervention

<p>We now know that the Andes hantavirus has been identified on the MV Hondius, what does that mean for St Helena?</p>	<p>Although human-to-human spread is possible with this variant, the risk to the wider population remains low as transmission requires prolonged close personal contact. This does not affect our planning or response, which has been based on this assumption from the outset.</p>
<p>Has there been contact tracing of those in the community that would have interacted with the passengers, or been on board the MV Hondius?</p>	<p>Yes. All individuals identified as having had potential contact with passengers from the MV <i>Hondius</i> have been contacted directly by health officials.</p>
<p>What advice and support are being given to those who did interact with the passengers, or been on board the MV Hondius?</p>	<p>They have each received tailored advice based on their level of interaction, including what symptoms to look out for, what steps to take if they feel unwell, and who to contact for further support.</p> <p>If you believe you may have been in contact with any passengers and have not yet been contacted, or if you develop symptoms or are worried you may have been exposed, please call the Hantavirus Screening Line on 25949 between 08:30 and 16:00.</p> <p>At this stage, the risk to the wider public remains low, and monitoring is being carried out in line with public health guidance.</p>
<p>Do we have tests on island for hantavirus?</p>	<p>No. Hantavirus testing is highly specialised and only conducted in a small number of laboratories worldwide. We can test for a wide range of other more common causes of the symptoms of hantavirus. This will enable our medical team to rule out these more common causes.</p>



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Do I need to isolate at home?	Only those persons identified by Public Health to have had close and prolonged contact with a confirmed or suspected case of hantavirus will be asked to enter isolation (i.e. staying at home). These people have been contacted directly and provided with additional information and support. A member of the Health & Social Care Portfolio will contact every isolating person daily, to perform a wellbeing and symptom check. A follow-up medical assessment will be performed if necessary.
Do other members of my household need to isolate with me?	Other members of your household do not need to isolate with you. You should, however, minimise any face-to-face contact with those in isolation, staying in a separate room if possible. If you are isolating and develop symptoms, you should advise your household to start isolation until your symptoms have been assessed.
How long will I need to isolate for?	There is no standard isolation period for everyone. Higher risk contacts will be asked to isolate for a period of 45 days since their last known contact with a case of hantavirus. Lower risk contacts who develop symptoms will be asked to isolate until their symptoms have been assessed by a healthcare professional.
What should I do if I am a contact and develop symptoms?	If you develop symptoms, especially fever, contact Hantavirus Screening Line on Tele No: 25949 between 08:30 and 16:00 or Tele No: 22626 out of hours. DO NOT visit the hospital in person in the first instance. Early supportive care can improve outcomes.
Is there a vaccine or specific cure?	There is no vaccine or specific treatment for hantavirus infections. Treatment is supportive and based on symptoms,



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	<p>such as hospital care and respiratory support.</p> <p>Those who become unwell following with a suspected hantavirus infection are likely to require medical evacuation to South Africa.</p>
<p>The risk to the general public is described as “low,” how is that being assessed?</p>	<p>The public health risk assessment is based on the local investigation into the incident, expert advice from the UK Health Security Agency, and the best available scientific evidence from around the world.</p> <p>Most people in St Helena (more than 95%) have had no close contact with the passengers or crew of the MV Hondius, or boarded the vessel itself, and are currently at an extremely low risk of infection.</p> <p>Although the Andes hantavirus has been documented to spread between people, this has only been reported in rare outbreaks. The risk to casual or passing contacts is therefore also very low.</p> <p>All higher risk contacts have been instructed to isolate as a precautionary measure to minimise any risk of person-to-person spread, in the unlikely event that they do develop symptoms. A robust plan for assessment and subsequent care is in place, including appropriate infection prevention and control procedures.</p>

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What are the maritime health protocols currently in place for visiting vessels?

Routine and proportionate public health precautions are in place for all visiting cruise vessels. These are implemented in line with the Port and Aerodrome (Health) Ordinance 2018, the International Health Regulations (IHR), and relevant maritime health legislation.

For screening purposes, vessels are required to submit a Maritime Declaration of Health (MDH) in advance of arrival, together with a valid Ship Sanitation Certificate. An updated MDH is also required on the day of arrival. These requirements are standard under the IHR and local legislation. Where any information provided gives cause concern, the matter is escalated to the Medical Officer/line manager for assessment and direction.

Passengers and crew are therefore subject to standard international maritime health requirements prior to arrival, with additional local controls applied by Customs, Immigration, and Health at the point of disembarkation. Ships' Masters have a legal duty to comply with these requirements and to notify the competent authority/port health of any actual or suspected illness, infection, or contamination on board.

Any individuals identified as unwell, or presenting symptoms of concern, would be managed appropriately by Health Services in accordance with local public health procedures and the visiting vessel's own medical protocols. In cases such as onboard deaths or medical evacuations, the Medical Officer is typically aware of the details before matters are referred formally to Environmental Health/Port Health.

These arrangements are kept under regular review and reflect the current public health risk. The recent Hondius case was an extremely rare and isolated incident and does not alter our established approach, which remains in business as usual for visiting vessels.

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TIMELINE

Date	Key Events & Developments
1 April	MV Hondius departs Ushuaia, Argentina.
6–11 April	A male passenger (P1) becomes unwell and subsequently dies from breathing difficulties. There is nothing out of the ordinary at this stage. The body is placed into frozen storage shortly after death.
22–24 April	The MV Hondius visits St Helena. A number of passengers disembark to visit the island, with 30 ending their journey on the island.
24 April	The body of the deceased is taken from the MV Hondius to St Helena using standard health precaution measures. The body remains in secure storage, having subsequently been embalmed using full infectious disease protocols.
25 April	A number of passengers from MV Hondius depart St Helena on the Airlink flight. The wife of the deceased (P2) becomes seriously unwell
26 April	P2 sadly passes away in Johannesburg, South Africa.
27–28 April	A male passenger (P3) becomes seriously unwell on board HV Hondius. MV Hondius diverts to Ascension where the patient is treated before being medically evacuated to South Africa. He remains in a critical but stable condition.
30 April	The working diagnosis for P3 from medical professionals in South Africa is pneumonia with sepsis. At this stage the most likely cause is considered to be legionella – an infection that cannot be passed from person-to-person.
1 May	The medical teams on St Helena and Ascension identify a potential link between P1, P2 and P3 and identify the international authorities for the first time.
2–3 May	Hantavirus is diagnosed for the first time. Tracing begins immediately and the team work across the weekend. All identified higher risk individuals are contacted and given self-isolation advice. Further suspected cases are identified on the MV Hondius. It is identified that P2 and P3 came ashore on St Helena whilst showing signs of mild viral illness.[]
4 May	Public are made aware of hantavirus for the first time following verification of the details of possible exposure in St Helena. At this point we can already reassure them that identified higher risk individuals are in isolation. Lower risk individuals begin to be contacted but do not need to change their daily activities.
5–10 May	All those involved in the public health response to the hantavirus incident continue working extended hours, including weekends and holidays.

SHG press releases continue to be issued daily with the relevant information.

Neither St Helena nor Ascension have any suspected cases at this time. Tristan da Cunha has one probable case, in a male who was a passenger on the MV Hondius.

Worldwide there are currently only 8 cases, 6 confirmed, and 3 deaths(WHO data). ALL of the 8 were passengers on board the MV Hondius and therefore in prolonged, close contact with one another.