

Name. Parneet Singh
Student id. DE240106

Health Threats in Tourism Course
Lecturer: Mahmoud Abdou
May 16, 2025



Assignment 3

1- Explain, in no more than 750 words, one communicable disease commonly found on cruise ships. Describe its effects on tourists and the various precautions taken to prevent or control its spread.

Norovirus on Cruise Ships: Causes, Effects, and Prevention

Norovirus is one of the most common communicable diseases found on cruise ships. Sometimes referred to as the “cruise ship virus,” norovirus is a highly contagious gastrointestinal illness that causes outbreaks of vomiting and diarrhea among passengers and crew. The closed and communal environment of cruise ships makes it especially vulnerable to rapid transmission of this virus.

Effects on Tourists

Norovirus affects the gastrointestinal tract, and symptoms usually begin 12 to 48 hours after exposure. Common symptoms include:

Nausea

Vomiting

Diarrhea

Stomach cramps

Fever and body aches (less common)

Though norovirus symptoms usually last only one to three days, they can severely impact a tourist's experience. Infected individuals may be confined to their cabins to prevent further spread. Activities, shore excursions, and on-board entertainment often have to be missed. In rare cases, particularly for the elderly or those with pre-existing conditions, dehydration caused by vomiting and diarrhea may require hospitalization.

Norovirus is not typically life-threatening, but its presence can disrupt the operation of the cruise. Entire events or areas may be shut down temporarily, and port stops might be shortened or canceled to deal with the outbreak. Additionally, travelers may face extended quarantine periods or additional screening when disembarking or returning home.

How Norovirus Spreads

Norovirus spreads through:

Direct person-to-person contact

Consuming contaminated food or water

Touching contaminated surfaces and then touching the mouth

The virus can survive on surfaces for days and resists many standard cleaning agents. This resilience, coupled with the close quarters on cruise ships, makes containment especially difficult.

Prevention and Control Measures

Cruise lines follow strict protocols to prevent and control norovirus outbreaks. These include both pre-boarding and on-board strategies:

1. Pre-Boarding Screening

Before boarding, passengers are typically asked to fill out health questionnaires. Those reporting symptoms of gastrointestinal illness may be denied boarding or asked to delay

their trip. Crew members are also screened, and symptomatic employees are not allowed to work until cleared.

2. Sanitation Protocols

Cruise ships implement rigorous sanitation procedures:

Frequent cleaning of high-touch surfaces (handrails, elevator buttons, door handles)

Use of disinfectants proven to kill norovirus

Regular deep cleaning of cabins and public areas

During an outbreak, cleaning frequency increases, and additional staff may be assigned to sanitation duties.

3. Hand Hygiene Promotion

Passengers are regularly reminded to wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water, especially before meals and after using the restroom. Hand sanitizer stations are widely available throughout the ship, particularly at entrances to dining areas and theaters.

4. Food Safety

Strict food safety regulations are in place to prevent foodborne transmission:

All food is stored, prepared, and served under hygienic conditions

Crew handling food receive regular training on hygiene practices

Buffets often have staff serving food rather than allowing self-service

5. Isolation and Quarantine

If someone becomes ill on board, they are quickly isolated in their cabin to limit contact with others. Meals and necessities are delivered to the room, and medical staff monitor the patient. In cases of larger outbreaks, cruise lines may initiate enhanced protocols, including limiting group gatherings and closing shared facilities temporarily.

6. Communication with Health Authorities

Cruise ships are required to report any outbreak affecting more than 3% of passengers or crew to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) under the Vessel Sanitation Program (VSP). The CDC may inspect the ship, offer guidance, or even recommend the termination of the voyage in severe cases.

Conclusion

Norovirus is the most frequently reported communicable disease on cruise ships, largely due to its ease of transmission and the ship environment. Though it usually causes short-term discomfort, it can have a significant impact on travelers' health and experience. Cruise lines take extensive measures to minimize the risk and manage outbreaks effectively. Education, hygiene, and prompt isolation remain the best defenses against this resilient virus. By following recommended precautions and cooperating with onboard protocols, both passengers and crew can help reduce the risk and enjoy a safer voyage.