



health

Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



MEDIA STATEMENT

To: Editors & Health Journalists
Issued by: Department of Health
Date: Monday, 04 May 2026

Health Department confirms the deaths of tourists from severe acute respiratory infection

Pretoria: The Department of Health has been informed by the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) of the medical condition and reported deaths of passengers of an international cruise ship (MV Hondius) travelling from Southern Argentina to Canary Islands via Cape Verde.

While the ship was travelling past South African shores, some of the passengers experienced serious health complications arising from what was initially considered severe acute respiratory infections.

The ship, carrying about 150 tourists from various countries, had departed Ushuaia, Southern Argentina, for Canary Islands about three weeks ago. Enroute to its destination, the ship went past several islands, including mainland Antarctica, Falklands, South Georgia, Nightingale Island, Tristan, St Helena, and Ascension.

In terms of medical cases, the first patient was a 70-year-old male passenger who suddenly became ill in the ship enroute from Ushuaia to St Helena Island, and presented with fever, headache, abdominal pain, and diarrhoea. Unfortunately, he passed away on arrival at St Helena Island. His mortal remains are in St Helena, awaiting repatriation to Netherlands.

The second affected passenger was of a 69 year-old female, the spouse to the first patient, who collapsed at the OR Tambo International Airport while trying to connect a flight to her home country of the Netherlands. She was taken to a nearby health facility around Kempton Park for medical attention

and unfortunately passed away. Laboratory test results for the patient are outstanding.

The third patient, a British national, also became ill while the ship was travelling from St Helena to Ascension. Despite medical treatment provided to him at Ascension, his condition did not improve and necessitated his medical evacuation to a South African private health facility in Sandton for further medical management. His laboratory test results came back positive for Hantavirus - a rare but potentially deadly virus transmitted primarily by rodents. The patient is still in critical condition in isolation, but receiving medical attention.

The Department is working with the NICD and Gauteng Health Department authorities to conduct contact tracing to stop potential spread of the virus by identifying and monitoring individuals who may have been exposed to the infected persons.

In our view, there is no need for the public to panic because only two patients from the cruise ship have been within our borders. The World Health Organization is coordinating a multi-country response with all affected islands and countries to contain further spread of the disease.

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