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Passenger Shipping Association Statement on Norovirus

The Passenger Shipping Association (PSA), as the UK industry body for cruising, places paramount importance on the health and safety of passengers and crew onboard cruise ships.

Gastroenteritis, or norovirus, is the most common cause of stomach bugs in England and Wales and the illness is second in prevalence only to the common cold, according to the UK Health Protection Agency. Symptoms of the illness include upset stomach, diarrhoea or vomiting and usually last for 24-48 hours. Frequent outbreaks occur ashore in areas such as schools, hospitals, retirement homes, hotels and other places where people congregate. The UK Health Protection Agency estimates that around 1 in every 30 persons in the UK will contract this illness on land each year.

Cruise lines have adopted common protocols for dealing with the occurrence of gastroenteritis, which includes stringent preventative measures. Cruise companies advise passengers, who have booked a cruise with them, to alert the cruise line that they are travelling with to any recent gastrointestinal upset they might have experienced. This advice is repeated upon embarkation. When the virus does occur at sea, it is normally the result of a passenger bringing the virus onboard a cruise ship unwittingly. If passengers develop symptoms, they are strongly encouraged to report them to the ship's medical officers without delay, where passengers are normally treated free of charge.

To prevent gastroenteritis from entering the cruise ship environment and to prevent transmission to other passengers once suspected, PSA members have implemented comprehensive disinfection protocols, developed in conjunction with UK and international health authorities. Some of the measures employed include:

- Passengers with obvious symptoms are not boarded.
- Passengers who experience symptoms are asked to remain in isolation for up to 48 hours.
- All crew with symptoms can be quarantined.
- An aggressive onboard communications effort encourages guests to frequently wash their hands.
- Aboard the ship, staterooms and public areas are cleaned and disinfected daily including, but not limited to, counters, bathroom surfaces, door handles, railings and grab bars, exercise equipment and TV remote controls.
- On turn-around days, extra assistance is brought onboard to disinfect the ship with a recommended chlorine-based solution from top to bottom before additional passengers board.
- Onboard medical facilities and staff can distribute medications for symptomatic treatment of nausea or gastrointestinal illness. This assistance is free of charge if related to an occurrence of Norovirus.

Ends

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