# Costa Favolosa’s sickness outbreak in Lerwick sparks criticism over delayed health warnings



An Italian cruise line has faced serious criticism following a sickness outbreak aboard its vessel, the Costa Favolosa, which resulted in thousands of passengers arriving in Lerwick, Shetland, without prior notification of the health issues on board. Passengers reported symptoms of mild gastrointestinal illness during a week-long Northern European voyage from Hamburg, and both NHS Shetland and Lerwick Port Authority specified they were not alerted to any public health concerns prior to the ship's docking on May 20.

Dr Susan Laidlaw, director of Public Health at NHS Shetland, indicated that the health authority learned of the illness through the Port Health route late in the afternoon of the ship's arrival. She noted that while a small number of passengers exhibited symptoms of gastroenteritis and were being managed appropriately by the vessel’s medical team, the delay in communication sparked local concern. Lerwick Port Authority clarified that vessels calling at the harbour must declare any health concerns, and in this case, no prior warning was given regarding the Costa Favolosa.

As soon as it became evident that passengers were unwell, local operators swiftly cancelled shore excursions. Sonia Robertson, managing director of R. Robertson and Son, noted that the situation could have severely impacted her business and employees, particularly after witnessing a guest becoming acutely ill. Reports highlighted that almost 3,000 passengers congregated in the town centre before local businesses were made aware of the situation, leading to calls from community members for better preparation and communication. Celia Smith, the owner of coffee shop Blyde Welcome, expressed frustration over the lack of warning, mentioning the absence of sanitising materials that could have mitigated the spread of illness.

Despite the complaints, cruise operator Costa Cruises maintained that the decision to dock in Lerwick was within regulations and stated that upon observing symptoms among guests, they instituted enhanced cleaning and disinfection protocols onboard. Meanwhile, Lerwick Port Authority has reached out to involved parties to improve procedural documentation to prevent such oversights in future.

The incident in Lerwick resonates with several historical instances of gastrointestinal outbreaks on cruise ships. In 2013, the Fred Olsen cruise ship Black Watch returned to Rosyth after 130 passengers fell ill during a Scandinavian voyage, illustrating how common such outbreaks can be in the tightly packed environment of cruise vessels. Previous outbreaks have underscored the challenges of managing health concerns at sea and the swift actions necessary upon docking to safeguard public health. A similar situation occurred in 2010 with the NorthLink ferry Hjaltland, which had to undergo a 48-hour quarantine due to sickness among passengers before alternative transport arrangements were made.

Local health authorities advise that preventative measures like rigorous handwashing and the use of bleach-based cleaning products are essential in mitigating the risk of gastrointestinal infections, particularly in environments like cruise ships that can act as hotspots for such illnesses. Moving forward, the importance of communication between cruise operators and local health authorities will be critical in ensuring public safety and confidence in future tourism activities.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/costa-favolosa-lerwick-shetlands-sickness-outbreak-b2760538.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/costa-favolosa-lerwick-shetlands-sickness-outbreak-b2760538.html), [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-24180114)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/costa-favolosa-lerwick-shetlands-sickness-outbreak-b2760538.html), [[3]](https://www.shetnews.co.uk/2010/06/07/48-hour-quarantine-for-northlink-ferry/), [[4]](https://www.bbc.com/news/10256354)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/news/highlands-islands/5768737/cruise-ship-passengers-airlifted-after-falling-ill-near-shetland/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2009/jul/07/cruise-ship-death-norovirus-link)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/costa-favolosa-lerwick-shetlands-sickness-outbreak-b2760538.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/costa-favolosa-lerwick-shetlands-sickness-outbreak-b2760538.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-24180114> - In September 2013, Fred Olsen's Black Watch cruise ship experienced a gastroenteritis outbreak during a 12-night Scandinavia and St Petersburg voyage. A total of 130 passengers fell ill, leading to the ship's return to Rosyth, Fife, where intensive cleaning and fumigation were conducted. Health authorities confirmed satisfaction with the containment measures, and the illness was described as common in environments where people are in close proximity, with symptoms typically subsiding within one or two days.
3. <https://www.shetnews.co.uk/2010/06/07/48-hour-quarantine-for-northlink-ferry/> - In June 2010, a sickness outbreak among a coach party of holidaymakers visiting Shetland led NorthLink ferry Hjaltland to be quarantined for 48 hours. The illness, likely caused by a virus prior to the group's arrival, affected several passengers and crew members. The ferry was subjected to a deep clean, and alternative arrangements were made for passengers, including a shuttle service using another ferry, Hrossey, to maintain travel schedules.
4. <https://www.bbc.com/news/10256354> - In 2010, an outbreak of sickness and diarrhoea on the NorthLink ferry Hjaltland led to its withdrawal from the Aberdeen to Shetland route. The illness affected a bus tour party from Hereford and later crew members. The ferry underwent intensive cleaning and hygiene measures, and a continuous shuttle service was established using the sister vessel, Hrossey, to minimise disruption to passengers.
5. <https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/news/highlands-islands/5768737/cruise-ship-passengers-airlifted-after-falling-ill-near-shetland/> - In 2019, three cruise ship passengers in their 60s were airlifted to hospital after falling ill near Shetland. The passengers developed medical problems approximately 50 miles east of Sumburgh, prompting a Coastguard helicopter rescue. They were transferred to the Gilbert Bain Hospital in Lerwick; their condition was not specified in the report.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2009/jul/07/cruise-ship-death-norovirus-link> - In July 2009, the Marco Polo cruise liner experienced a suspected norovirus outbreak off the coast of Scotland, affecting approximately 200 passengers. Four individuals were treated and discharged from Raigmore hospital in Inverness. A postmortem was planned for a man who died during the outbreak to determine any link with the suspected norovirus. The ship was inspected by health officials, and NHS Highland reassured the public that there was no risk to the local community.
7. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-24359716> - In September 2013, Fred Olsen's Boudicca cruise ship experienced a gastroenteritis outbreak during a 10-night Scandinavian Cities Cruise from Belfast. A number of guests suffered from the illness, leading to the ship's return to Belfast for a sanitisation and cleaning programme. The company contacted guests booked on the next scheduled cruise to inform them of the situation and the measures taken.