# Costa Favolosa outbreak in Lerwick sparks scrutiny over health communication and local economic impact



An Italian cruise line has faced significant backlash following an incident involving the Costa Favolosa, where nearly 3,000 passengers were allowed to disembark in Lerwick, Shetland, despite reports of gastrointestinal illness on board. Passengers had been sailing on a seven-day cruise from Hamburg when symptoms began to emerge. On 20 May, shortly before the ship docked, both NHS Shetland and the Lerwick Port Authority expressed concern over not having been informed of any health issues prior to the arrival of the vessel.

Dr Susan Laidlaw, director of Public Health at NHS Shetland, remarked that the health body was only alerted to the situation late in the afternoon of the same day. “However, we now understand that a small number of passengers with symptoms of gastroenteritis were being appropriately managed by the medical team on-board the vessel,” she stated. The implication that effective measures were in place on the ship raises questions about the timely communication between cruise operators and health authorities, particularly given that a mandatory health declaration should have been made prior to the ship's arrival.

Local businesses quick to react included R. Robertson and Son, a bus company that cancelled tours after witnessing one passenger visibly sick. Managing Director Sonia Robertson highlighted the potential economic impact, noting, “Something like this could have crippled the whole company and affect a lot of our staff and services.” Meanwhile, Celia Smith, owner of Blyde Welcome coffee shop, shared that local businesses felt unprepared for the situation, stating, “We could’ve been better prepared; we could’ve had more sanitiser and some businesses had face masks.”

This incident isn’t isolated; cruises have historically been venues for gastrointestinal illness outbreaks. In May 2024, P&O Cruises’ Ventura experienced a significant norovirus outbreak, affecting over 500 individuals. Similarly, earlier reports have chronicled several outbreaks aboard vessels, emphasizing the challenges of managing health on ships, particularly amid crowded conditions. The Fred Olsen cruise ship, The Black Watch, had experienced multiple outbreaks, illustrating the persistent vulnerabilities associated with large-scale maritime travel. In one such case, authorities highlighted that preventing cross-contamination during passenger embarkations and disembarkations posed a particular challenge, especially in terminals without adequate segregation.

Following the Lerwick incident, Costa Cruises asserted that it obtained the necessary clearance to dock. They claimed that upon receiving reports of mild gastrointestinal symptoms, enhanced disinfection and sanitation measures were swiftly enacted. However, the overall effectiveness and speed of response to such health concerns are crucial. Dr Laidlaw recommended hand washing and the use of bleach-based cleaning products to mitigate the spread of infection.

In light of this event and similar outbreaks, authorities like Lerwick Port Authority are reassessing their protocols. The Authority indicated that parties involved in such situations would undergo measures to tighten documentation and health declaration procedures before ports of call, aiming to ensure that health issues are disclosed timely in the future. The repercussions of such outbreaks extend beyond immediate health concerns, impacting local economies and the broader cruise industry, which relies heavily on passenger volumes for economic vitality.

As public health and cruise lines navigate the complexities of managing outbreaks, the overarching reliance on effective communication and stringent health protocols remains paramount. With cruise tourism experiencing a resurgence, lessons learnt from incidents such as this are critical for safeguarding both passenger health and local communities.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/costa-favolosa-lerwick-shetlands-sickness-outbreak-b2760538.html), [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3ggrxly85no)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/costa-favolosa-lerwick-shetlands-sickness-outbreak-b2760538.html), [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-24367251)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3ggrxly85no), [[4]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cv22xd5g15ro), [[6]](https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/cunard-cruises-passengers-sickness-outbreak-cdc-b2488573.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/costa-favolosa-lerwick-shetlands-sickness-outbreak-b2760538.html), [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cxxxn974pe6o)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/costa-favolosa-lerwick-shetlands-sickness-outbreak-b2760538.html), [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3ggrxly85no), [[7]](https://cruiseindustrynews.com/cruise-news/2024/08/port-of-aberdeen-welcomes-costa-favolosa-reports-record-breaking-arrivals/)

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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/articles/c3ggrxly85no> - In May 2024, P&O Cruises' Ventura experienced a significant norovirus outbreak, affecting over 500 passengers and crew members. The ship, which departed Southampton on 11 May, had to undergo deep cleaning upon returning to the UK. Passengers reported widespread illness, with some areas of the ship being closed off due to vomiting incidents. The outbreak led to delays for new passengers boarding, as enhanced sanitation measures were implemented. Health officials from Southampton City Council and the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) collaborated to manage the situation and prevent further spread of the virus.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-24367251> - In 2013, the Fred Olsen cruise ship The Black Watch suffered a fourth norovirus outbreak, with 131 of 737 guests affected. This followed three previous outbreaks on the same vessel, totaling 302 cases. The ship underwent deep cleaning after each incident and was cleared to sail following inspections by health authorities. NHS Fife confirmed that none of the passengers disembarking in Rosyth had suffered serious illness. The company emphasized the challenges of preventing cross-contamination in cruise terminals lacking segregation between disembarking and embarking guests.
4. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cv22xd5g15ro> - In May 2024, passengers aboard P&O Cruises' Ventura reported widespread illness due to a norovirus outbreak. The ship, which had departed Southampton on 11 May, docked in Southampton on 25 May with nearly 3,000 passengers disembarking. Passengers described the cruise as 'absolutely horrendous,' citing areas blocked off due to vomiting incidents. P&O Cruises stated that 0.64% of those on board had symptoms of norovirus after sanitation measures were implemented. The company apologized to those affected and emphasized the efficacy of their extensive protocols.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cxxxn974pe6o> - In May 2024, P&O Cruises' Ventura experienced a norovirus outbreak, leading to health officials meeting the ship upon its return to the UK. Passengers reported symptoms of sickness and diarrhoea. P&O Cruises implemented enhanced sanitation protocols, and Southampton Port Health Authority offered assistance upon the ship's return. The company stated that 0.64% of those on board were symptomatic, highlighting the efficacy of their extensive protocols. The ship was scheduled to depart the same day for a seven-night trip to Spain and Portugal.
6. <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/cunard-cruises-passengers-sickness-outbreak-cdc-b2488573.html> - In early 2023, over 100 passengers aboard Cunard's Queen Victoria cruise ship fell ill due to a sickness outbreak. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that 116 of the 1,824 passengers, approximately 6%, suffered from gastrointestinal illness, with 15 crew members also affected. The main symptoms reported were diarrhoea and vomiting. Queen Victoria, which had been on a 107-night world voyage since January, was due to return to the UK port at the end of April.
7. <https://cruiseindustrynews.com/cruise-news/2024/08/port-of-aberdeen-welcomes-costa-favolosa-reports-record-breaking-arrivals/> - In August 2024, the Port of Aberdeen welcomed the Costa Favolosa, marking the largest vessel to visit the port in its 888-year history. The 290-meter ship arrived at South Harbour from Kirkwall on 26 July for a day-long stopover before heading to Edinburgh. The 4,000 guests and crew were greeted with a traditional Scottish welcome. This visit was part of a record-breaking season of 60 cruise calls, an increase of more than 150% from 2022. The port's cruise call bookings extend through 2027, with over 100 calls anticipated.