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Illness on cruise ship renews concern



While certain features of cruise ships are conducive to the spread of illness, experts said recent health events shouldn't necessarily dissuade passengers from setting sail. ERICK MARCISCANO/REUTERS

Experts say cruises remain safe despite recent outbreaks

Nathan Diller
USA TODAY

One viral outbreak on a cruise ship was already commanding worldwide attention last week when health officials reported another on a separate vessel.

Oceanwide Expeditions' MV Hondius was grappling with hantavirus cases that resulted in three deaths when more than 110 guests and crew members reported being ill in a norovirus outbreak aboard Princess Cruises' Caribbean Princess. The latter marked the fourth outbreak of gastrointestinal illness on

cruises to meet the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's threshold for public notification in 2026.

The timing may fuel a perception that cruise ships are frequently at the center of health crises. However, while certain features of the vessels are conducive to the spread of illness, experts said the events shouldn't necessarily dissuade passengers from setting sail.

The MV Hondius outbreak, which prompted a coordinated response from the World Health Organization and other international authorities, evoked aspects of the early days of the COVID-19

pandemic. In 2020, cruise ships became early sites of high-profile outbreaks, including aboard Princess Cruises' Diamond Princess.

Unlike land-based hotels, where guests are coming and going all day, ships are a "closed environment," according to Dr. Ian Lipkin, John Snow Professor of Epidemiology and director of the Center for Infection and Immunity at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health.

"If somebody is ill, whether that be

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Dollar General grants boost MI literacy

Janis Reeser
Port Huron Times Herald
USA TODAY NETWORK

Michigan schools, libraries and nonprofit groups are set to receive more than \$280,000 in literacy funding, according to a community announcement issued by Dollar General Literacy Foundation. The money is intended to support reading and education programs across the state.

The grants are part of a nationwide single-day award total of nearly \$16 million. The funding supports adult, family and summer literacy programs in the 48 states where Dollar General operates.

In Michigan, the grants are expected to affect more than 9,600 people, according to the announcement.

The grants are for nonprofit organizations, libraries and schools. According to the announcement, eligible groups must be within a 15-mile radius of a Dollar General store or distribution center.

The money may be used for new technology, books, materials or software. The grants can help groups start literacy programs or expand existing ones.

Several Michigan organizations received grants of \$10,000, the highest amount. Those recipients included:

- Adrian Rea Literacy Center in Adrian
- Arab Community Center For Economic And Social Services (Access) in Dearborn

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Tips for staying safe in black bear encounters

Sarah Moore
USA TODAY NETWORK

More than 12,000 black bears inhabit Michigan, and while seeing one of the usually shy creatures can be thrilling, there are precautions nature lovers should take to avoid a dangerous situation.

Black bears began emerging from hibernation in March, and they will remain active through through fall.

About 10,350 black bears are believed to live in the Upper Peninsula, and 2,100 in the Lower Peninsula, according to a 2024 survey from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

Through the years, the state's black bear population has been growing and they have been occupying more territory in the Lower Peninsula, according to

the Michigan United Conservation Clubs.

DNR officials said they have received about 285 bear complaints per year over the past 20 years, with 303 complaints in 2024. Counties with the most bear complaints in 2024 included Upper Peninsula counties Marquette (41 complaints), Houghton (29), Chippewa (25) and Delta (24); but also northern Lower Peninsula counties Otsego (26), Charlevoix (19), Leelanau (16) and Grand Traverse (13).

Black bears have even been seen more frequently in Ohio, with officials at the Ohio Department of Natural Resources saying they may be starting to reestablish themselves in the state, according to a recent Akron Beacon Journal article.

The 300-to 600-pound animals will eat just about anything, including



Black bears emerge from their winter nests. PROVIDED BY DAVID KENYON/DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

scraps from trash cans, seeds from bird feeders and even have been known to break into homes in search of a good meal.

Bears want to avoid human interaction, but if they feel threatened enough – especially if a female or sow feels her cubs need protection – they may attack, according to BearWise, a program that promotes a safe human-and-bear coexistence.

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