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# Argus Leader

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## 'Important step forward'

Sanford signs agreement to merge with Twin Cities-based health system

**Vanessa Carlson Bender**  
 Sioux Falls Argus Leader  
 USA TODAY NETWORK

Sanford Health has signed a definitive agreement to merge with North Memorial Health, pledging \$600 million to stabilize Robbinsdale Hospital and double the size of Maple Grove Hospital—its most significant bid yet to secure a foothold in the Twin Cities, according to a Sanford Health press release published Friday, May 8.

"Today marks an important step for-

ward as we build on and expand the care we provide across Minnesota — creating more choice for patients and connecting them to a broader network of providers, services and specialized expertise," said Bill Gassen, president and chief executive officer of Sanford Health.

The \$600 million investment will help modernize and sustain Robbinsdale Hospital's Level I trauma center and double the size of Maple Grove Hospital, an expansion Gassen said is needed to "meet rising demand in one of the

metro's fastest-growing communities."

"As one system, we will be better equipped to invest in expanded services and new technologies, navigate unexpected headwinds and build a stronger workforce pipeline," Gassen said. "Our history of combining with like-minded health systems has shaped who we are today, and demonstrates how we can learn from one another to improve care, strengthen resilience and deliver greater impact for patients and

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Sanford Health President and CEO Bill Gassen and Twin Cities' North Memorial Health CEO Trevor Sawallish on the helipad at North Memorial's hospital in Robbinsdale, Minnesota, in April. PROVIDED BY SANFORD HEALTH



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

## Hantavirus on cruise ship renews concern

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 somebody who's a member of a crew or staff or somebody who's a passenger, the probability that they're going to run into somebody else and communicate that is much higher than if it's only a sporadic intersection of these individuals," he told USA TODAY.

In addition to spending an extended period of time with other people "from different places with different exposures," the facilities tend to be more confined, added Dr. Emily Abdoler, an infectious disease specialist and clinical associate professor of medicine at the University of Michigan Medical School. The closer the proximity, the more likely travelers could spread illness to one another via respiratory droplets or surfaces.

"If people took week-long airplane

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## Construction begins on Wells Fargo Homebuilding Laboratory

**Morgan Matzen**  
 Sioux Falls Argus Leader  
 USA TODAY NETWORK

Construction will begin soon on a new Wells Fargo Homebuilding Lab at Southeast Technical College that will see students earn hands-on experience building affordable homes for local residents.

STC officials and elected leaders broke ground on the facility on the southeast side of campus Friday, May 8. It'll sit between the Ed Wood Trade and Industry Center on the STC campus, and the Sioux Falls School District's Career and Technical Education Academy.

In the past, students have only had opportunities to build homes off-campus through industry partnerships, but the lab will let students work on two houses at a time each school year, on-site and on campus, then give the homes to residents in the community through a partnership with Habitat for Humanity, similar to that at the CTE Academy and in the Harrisburg School District.

The lab, funded in part by Wells Fargo, was initially set to finish construction by the end of 2026, but construction supplies are backlogged, STC

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Sioux Falls School District Board of Education members Nan Kelly, Gail Swenson and Marc Murren, and Southeast Technical College President Cory Clasemann, break ground on the Wells Fargo Homebuilding Lab on the STC campus on May 8, 2026. MORGAN MATZEN / ARGUS LEADER

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