

CDC and Cruise Ship Sanitation: Protecting the Public's Health

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Vessel Sanitation Program (VSP) collaborates with the cruise ship industry to proactively protect the health of travelers and prevent illness transmission to U.S. ports. The program helps the industry implement comprehensive sanitation programs to minimize risks for gastrointestinal illness. VSP

- Inspects cruise ships (unannounced sanitation inspections and scheduled construction inspections);
- Monitors gastrointestinal illnesses on cruise ships and investigates or responds to outbreaks;
- Trains cruise ship employees on public health practices; and
- Provides health education and reliable and current public health information to the cruise ship industry, the traveling public, and others.

Cruise ships under VSP's jurisdiction

- Carry 13 or more passengers and
- Have a foreign itinerary with U.S. ports.

VSP is funded entirely by user service fees. Each vessel owner pays a fee, based on tonnage, for sanitation inspections conducted by Environmental Health Officers of the U.S. Public Health Service.

Conducting Inspections

Sanitation Inspections

VSP inspectors conduct unannounced sanitation inspections to see how well ships are operating and maintaining sanitation standards in accordance with the *VSP 2011 Operations Manual*. Inspectors provide public health guidance to cruise ship staff when standards are out of compliance. At the end of inspections, inspectors write a report describing inspection findings and recommendations.

Sanitation inspections are conducted while a ship is in a U.S. port.



National Center for Environmental Health
Division of Emergency and Environmental Health Services



Construction and Renovation Inspections

At the cruise industry's request, the program provides consultation during the construction and renovation of cruise ships. VSP conducts plan reviews to analyze a ship's design to eliminate environmental health risks and to incorporate modifications that create healthy environments.

Construction and renovation inspections are conducted while ships are in the shipyard.

Monitoring Gastrointestinal Illness and Investigating Outbreaks

Gastrointestinal Illness Monitoring

VSP maintains an electronic surveillance system that tracks cases of gastrointestinal illnesses. Cruise ships report these illnesses at specified times during voyages. VSP monitors the system to observe illness patterns.

Outbreak Investigations

When a gastrointestinal illness outbreak occurs, the program asks for logs and records, including gastrointestinal illness surveillance logs, so they can closely examine the information about the reported cases. The surveillance logs include details such as specific symptoms and the date and time the illness occurred.

VSP conducts outbreak investigations for ships sailing in the United States or within 15 days of arriving to a U.S. port. These investigations may be conducted either in the VSP office or on a cruise ship.



Training Cruise Ship Employees

The program's environmental health officers provide a 2.5-day training course to teach cruise ship supervisors the public health practices specified in the *VSP 2011 Operations Manual*. During the course, attendees can ask specific questions about VSP requirements and how they relate to their work.

Next Steps

VSP will continue its ongoing collaboration with the cruise ship industry by implementing advanced public health measures to prevent, identify, and control diseases associated with food, water, environmental contamination, and person-to-person transmission.

The program will continue to help U.S. and international public health agencies, the public, and the cruise ship industry to maintain the highest public health standards for passengers and crew members aboard cruise vessels by conducting training sessions, reviewing construction plans, and inspecting ships.

CDC will continue its efforts to use this model cooperative, voluntary public health service program as a basis for improved land-based public health programs.