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First Major Cruise Ship Company Requiring All Passengers to be Vaccinated Before Setting Sail

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United Kingdom-based Saga Cruises has become the first major cruise operator to require all its passengers to be Covid-19-vaccinated before participating in cruising on any of its ships. During the announcement, made Thursday, the company said it would move its cruise restart date to May which would allow potential customers to get vaccinated. Saga specializes in holidays for customers in their 50s and up, with the company stating it wanted to protect customers' health and safety.

In a statement to ABC News, the company said, "The health and safety of our customers has always been our number one priority at Saga, so we have taken the decision to require everyone

traveling with us to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Our customers want the reassurance of the vaccine and to know others traveling with them will be vaccinated too."

"Our new vaccination policy will be in addition to the detailed arrangements we have already put in place for when cruises and other holidays restart," Saga added.

Saga Cruises will also require pre-departure Covid-19 testing, enhanced sanitization, and has reduced ship capacity. The company said it has already reached out to customers who plan on traveling in 2021 to share details of the new requirements.

The world's largest cruise liners, Royal Caribbean, Norwegian Cruise Line and Carnival Corp. — the largest of them all — have not announced such plans. The cruise ship industry is among the hardest hit by the pandemic, with March making a full year since the industry came to a halt following no-sail orders from nations around the world, including the United States.

During a West Indian Company (WICO) board meeting last week, board member Enrique Rodriguez said the company [should be prepared for the possibility of not receiving a single cruise ship in all of 2021](#), citing the ongoing pandemic.

"I doubt we are going to see a cruise ship in 2021, with the rates going the way they are going, the death rates are only moving upward. I think in the back of your mind Mr. Ottley, you should prepare some type of plan that allows us to get to the end of 2021 without a single ship in port." Anthony Ottley is WICO's interim president and chief executive officer.

The latest CDC update on cruise ship travel states that the federal agency intends to take a phased approach to resuming passenger operations.

"These phases include (1) establishment of laboratory testing of crew onboard cruise ships in U.S. waters; (2) simulated voyages designed to test a cruise ship operators' ability to mitigate COVID-19 on cruise ships; (3) a certification process; and (4) a return to passenger voyages in a manner that mitigates the risk of COVID-19 introduction, transmission, or spread among passengers and crew onboard ships and ashore to communities," said the CDC. "These phases will be further determined based on public health considerations including the trajectory of COVID-19 transmission and the demonstrated ability of cruise ships operators to successfully employ measures that mitigate the risk of COVID-19."