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Requiring Passengers and Crew Members to be Vaccinated, Norwegian Cruises Asks CDC to Allow Trips From U.S. in July

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AP — The Norwegian Cruise Line is seeking permission to resume trips from U.S. ports on July 4, requiring passengers and crew members to be vaccinated against COVID-19 at least two weeks before the trip.

The Miami company said its precautions go well beyond steps taken by others in the travel and leisure industry that have already reopened, including airlines, hotel, restaurants and sporting events.

Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings Ltd plans to begin U.S. sailings at 60% of capacity and raise that to 80% in August and 100% in September. Norwegian also operates Oceania Cruises and Regent

Seven Seas Cruises.

The company's shares jumped 7.2% Monday and pulled the shares of rival cruise lines higher. Carnival Corp. rose 4.7% and Royal Caribbean Group gained 2.9%.

CEO Frank Del Rio detailed the request in a letter to Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC has blocked cruise ships from U.S. ports with a no-sail order since March 2020, after outbreaks on several ships around the world.

On Friday, the CDC updated its guidance to say that fully vaccinated people can travel within the U.S. without getting tested for the coronavirus or going into quarantine afterward. It also issued more technical details around its conditional plan to allow cruise ships in U.S. ports, but it did not say when cruise lines could resume sailing.

Still, Walensky urged caution and said she would "advocate against general travel overall" given the rising number of infections.

The CDC said Monday that it "is committed to working with the cruise industry and seaport partners to resume cruising" following a phased approach. "Cruising safely and responsibly during a global pandemic is difficult," especially with concern over new variants of COVID-19, the agency added.

An industry trade group, the Cruise Lines International Association, blasted the CDC's updated guidance and called for the agency to lift its no-sail order.

"The new requirements are unduly burdensome, largely unworkable, and seem to reflect a zero-risk objective rather than the mitigation approach to COVID that is the basis for every other US sector of our society," the group said. It said the CDC's requirements are hurting nearly half a million American workers at businesses that service cruise ships, "with no reasonable timeline provided for the safe return of cruising."