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Health Authorities in Florida Sue CDC to Restart Cruise Travel

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It's been over a year since cruise ships have been cleared to set sail in U.S. waters By. JOE RAEDLE/GETTY IMAGES

Florida health officials on Thursday filed suit against U.S. health authorities in a bid to force the restart of cruise travel, as the industry — Florida being a major cruise hub and the largest in the U.S. — has laid dormant for over a year even as travel restrictions for other industries have been eased.

The pressure comes as a mixed group of private and public sector supporters of cruise travel have in recent times called on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to ease what they say is the CDC's stringent and reckless stance against the industry. The agency has not cleared restart

even as major cruise ship operators have updated their criteria for voyages, among them mandatory vaccination for both crew and passengers.

The lawsuit was filed Thursday in the U.S. District Court in Tampa, Fla., against the CDC, the Department of Health and Human Services, their leaders and the U.S. government, according to the Wall Street Journal.

“We don’t believe the federal government has the right to mothball a major industry for over a year,” Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, a Republican, said at a press conference. “There’s really just no end in sight because whatever [federal authorities] do next, it’s probably going to be so cumbersome that the cruise lines aren’t even going to be able to sail.”

According to WSJ, the lawsuit asks the court to set aside and declare unlawful the CDC’s conditional-sailing order, which has been in place since October, and calls health authorities’ actions “arbitrary and capricious.” The state said it wants the cruise industry to be allowed to reopen with “reasonable safety protocols.”

The state of Florida said while the cruise industry has been singled out, other operations, including hotels, airlines and casinos, have been allowed to conduct business with Covid-19 protocols. The state also believes the CDC is acting outside its authority.

The CDC has not issued a statement on the matter, but on Thursday Biden Administration Press Secretary, Jen Psaki, said, “The CDC guidance is based on data and health and medical guidelines; hence, that’s why they put it out and why they regularly update it.”