

The Virgin Islands Consortium

CDC to Americans: Avoid Cruise Travel Regardless of Vaccination Status

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While the Disney Magic, pictured above, berthed at WICO and passengers were allowed to disembark on Thursday, Dec. 30 2021, the Disney Fantasy eventually left the WICO dock at about 9:30 a.m. the same day to spend the day at sea. By. DCLB

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Thursday delivered a blunt warning to Americans: avoid cruise ship travel at all costs, even if you're vaccinated against Covid-19.

The federal health authority's warning comes as the Omicron variant continues to spread throughout the country, including confirmed cases on dozens of cruise ships. As of

Thursday the CDC was [investigating 92 cruise ships](#) with reported cases of the virus.

"Even fully vaccinated travelers may be at risk for getting and spreading Covid-19 variants," the CDC said. "The virus that causes Covid-19 spreads easily between people in close quarters on board ships, and the chance of getting Covid-19 on cruise ships is very high, even if you are fully vaccinated and have received a Covid-19 vaccine booster dose."

The Cruise Lines International Association, a group representing Norwegian Cruise Lines, the Royal Caribbean Group and Carnival Corp., expressed disappointment with the CDC's latest decision. "While we are disappointed and disagree with the decision to single out the cruise industry—an industry that continues to go above and beyond compared to other sectors—CLIA and our ocean-going cruise line members remain committed to working collaboratively with the CDC in the interest of public health and safety," the group said.

The CLIA said that "cases identified on cruise ships consistently make up a very slim minority of the total population onboard—far fewer than on land—and the majority of those cases are asymptomatic or mild in nature, posing little to no burden on medical resources onboard or onshore."

Locally, while Governor Bryan on Monday expressed support for the cruise industry, referring to the cruise lines as important partners, the Health Department has been turning away a number of cruise ships in recent days, including at least one on Thursday. Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion said Monday that ships with a Covid-19 positivity rate of above 1 percent would be turned away based on an agreement with the local government and the cruise lines.

The Disney Fantasy was not allowed to berth at WICO on Thursday, and a previously planned berthing of the Norwegian Joy set for today has been canceled.

In a [statement](#), Disney said, "The Disney Fantasy did not call on St. Thomas today due to both an increase in Covid-19 cases on the island and a small number of fully vaccinated Crew Members and Guests – less than 1% of those on board – in isolation for Covid-19. Those affected by these breakthrough cases are either asymptomatic or have mild symptoms, and we are following CDC protocols for managing cases on board. We continue to operate with multiple layers of health and safety protocols in place, such as requiring vaccinations, PCR tests at the port prior to embarkation for all guests, testing of our Crew multiple times per week, enhanced cleaning protocols and a requirement that masks be worn in all indoor spaces."

Relative to the Norwegian Joy, WICO said, "The Norwegian Joy will not be docking at the West Indian Company Dock as scheduled on Friday, December 31st due to elevated Covid cases aboard the ship, primarily amongst the crew. Two other ships scheduled for Friday, Sky Princess and Norwegian Escape, are still scheduled to be in port."