

Australian cruiser docks after swine flu outbreak

May 30 2009, By ROD McGUIRK , Associated Press Writer



In this Nov. 6, 2007 image provided by P&O Cruises is the cruise ship the Pacific Dawn as it sails past the Sydney Opera House in Sydney. The ship with 2,000 passengers aboard will cut short a Great Barrier Reef voyage and head to a major Australian port after three crew members were found Thursday, May 28, 2009, to have swine flu. (AP Photo/P&O Crusies, James Morgan, HO)

(AP) -- An ocean liner docked in an Australian city on Saturday despite objections raised by port officials over a swine flu outbreak on board that cut short a Great Barrier Reef cruise.

Health officials screened 85 passengers who then disembarked from the Pacific Dawn in the Queensland state capital of Brisbane. The nearly 2,000 remaining passengers stayed aboard the ship, which docked for several hours before heading south for its final destination, Sydney.

Many appeared to be in high spirits, waving and giving thumbs up signs

as they walked from the terminal wearing face masks.

"We've still had a fantastic time, and I think the crew on the ship and most passengers have all looked at it with glasses half full," a Brisbane woman, who gave her name only as Tania, told Australian Broadcasting Corp.

The passengers were not allowed to disembark at islands and resorts in the coral reefs off the tropical Queensland coast after it emerged passengers from a previous sailing had tested positive for [swine flu](#).

When three crew members aboard the ship also tested positive for the virus Thursday, the 10-day journey north was aborted.

Seven passengers who exhibited flu-like symptoms were tested as well for the disease that has killed 100 people worldwide, but all were cleared before the ship docked in Brisbane, Queensland's chief health officer Jeannette Young said.

"While this is a comforting result, it is not time to drop our guard," she said in a statement.

Queensland state Health Minister Paul Lucas declared a medical emergency early Saturday to force the cruise terminal manager, Brookfield Multiplex Ltd., to allow the ship to dock.

"It was necessary to ensure the cooperation of the port operator as they were reluctant to allow the vessel to berth here," Lucas told reporters.

Brookfield Multiplex spokeswoman Kerrie Muscens declined to detail the company's concerns about the Pacific Dawn to The Associated Press. But she said the company had cooperated fully with the government and health authorities.

New South Wales state authorities, based in Sydney where the ship's [journey](#) began, have come under fire for their handling of the incident.

Officials have been criticized for allowing the Pacific Dawn to sail Monday before test results on passengers and crew from the previous week's cruise were known. The three crew who tested positive had been on the first cruise as well.

Authorities have also been blamed for contributing to the spread of the flu because they failed to advise passengers from last week's cruise to quarantine themselves. Authorities say they have now tightened their health procedures concerning cruise ships.

On Saturday, all the disembarking passengers were told to wear face masks and to isolate themselves in their homes or hotels for a week.

Australia's count of confirmed cases increased by 47 on Saturday to 254.

Swine flu worries have deepened across Asia as China reported on Friday its first suspected case of domestic transmission. The previous 13 cases had been infected while overseas.

Singapore's health ministry late Thursday said three more people there have contracted swine flu, a day after announcing the country's first case.

The Philippines announced two more cases Saturday, bringing the nation's total to 16. Thailand, meanwhile, announced its third case.

Lebanon, meanwhile, announced its first three cases in people who recently arrived from abroad.

The World Health Organization reported Friday that its global tally rose

to 15,510 swine flu cases in 53 countries.

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