

Scientology cruise ship quarantined in Caribbean after measles case

May 2 2019

A cruise ship owned by the Church of Scientology has been quarantined in the Caribbean port of Saint Lucia for two days because of a measles case, health authorities said Thursday.

Resurgence of the once-eradicated, highly-contagious disease is linked to the growing anti-vaccine movement in richer nations, which the World Health Organization (WHO) has identified as a major global health threat.

"Given the highly infectious nature of measles, along with the possibility that other persons onboard the vessel may have been in contact with and are now possibly infectious due to this disease, a decision was made not to allow persons to disembark," said Merlene Fredericks-James, the island's chief medical officer.

She added that the infected patient was a female crew member and that the ship was the Freewinds—a 440-foot (134-meter) vessel the Church of Scientology says is used for religious retreats and is normally based in Curacao.

The ship asked for 100 doses of measles vaccine, which Saint Lucia authorities are providing at no cost, with the patient under observation.

The church, founded by science fiction writer L Ron Hubbard in 1953, did not respond to requests for comment.

Its teachings do not directly oppose vaccination, but followers consider illness a sign of personal failing and generally eschew medical interventions.

Tony Ortega, who runs a blog about the group, told AFP: "When a Scientologist gets a cold, they would be asked to write an essay about who they think that is against the church that is making them sick.

"They would definitely be interrogating that person and they would punish that person because when you're sick like that, in Scientology, it's always your own fault."

The Church of Scientology has various levels its members can attain that become more expensive as they progress.

According to Ortega, the Freewinds was launched by the church in 1988 for the highest level members can reach, known as "OT VIII" or "Operating Thetan Level 8."

An estimated 169 million children worldwide missed out on the vital first dose of the measles vaccine between 2010 and 2017, according to a UNICEF report issued last month.

There were four times as many measles cases in the first quarter of this year as in the corresponding period in 2018.

According to the last statement issued by Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) on April 18, only one Caribbean country, The Bahamas, has had a case of measles in 2019, a four-year-old child who had come from France.

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