

Japan cruise ship virus cases climb to 174

February 12 2020

Another 39 people aboard the Diamond Princess cruise ship in Japan have tested positive for the new coronavirus, authorities said Wednesday, as thousands more steel themselves for a second week in quarantine.

With 174 confirmed cases, the ship that arrived with over 3,700 passengers and crew has become the largest single cluster of the newly named COVID-19 virus outside its origin in China, where it has killed more than 1,100.

Passengers and crew are now halfway through a 14-day quarantine that is due to end on February 19 and have been mostly confined to their quarters, aside from being allowed brief periods on deck while wearing [face masks](#).

"You sit out on the balcony and you hear people coughing all the way along," British [passenger](#) Sally Abel said in a video streamed on Facebook.

"It is nothing like a holiday, but it is complete relaxation," she added.

Fellow passenger Yardley Wong tweeted: "Anxiety uprisen" on news of the new cases, saying she didn't know whether she or her family might be next.

On board the ship, the captain told passengers the situation was changing all the time.

"We are following the latest and best public health guidelines from the authorities," he said in a broadcast that passengers relayed on [social media](#).

He apologised for the "periodic service disruptions" to the internet, adding: "Diamond Princess has more bandwidth than any ship in the world, and at the same time, more mobile devices than ever before connected on a ship."

Passengers have been active on social media throughout their quarantine and have been trying to stave off boredom and anxiety with on-demand movies, quizzes and games of Sudoku.

'Captain's leadership'

Japanese Health Minister Katsunobu Kato told reporters early Wednesday that the 39 new positive cases came from 53 additional test results.

He said a quarantine officer was among those diagnosed, with the Yomiuri Shimbun daily reporting he had not been wearing a full protective suit while carrying out tests before the quarantine period began on February 5.

Kato also revealed there were four people in hospital in serious condition, either on a ventilator or in intensive care.

The Diamond Princess has been in quarantine since arriving off the Japanese coast early last week after the virus was detected in a former passenger who got off the ship in Hong Kong.

Passengers have been asked to keep a distance from each other when out of their cabins, and given thermometers to regularly monitor their own

temperatures.

When the boat arrived off Japan, authorities initially tested nearly 300 people of the 3,711 aboard for the virus, gradually evacuating dozens who were infected to local medical facilities.

In recent days, testing has expanded to 492 people, mostly those showing symptoms or who have had close contact with a confirmed positive case.

"Currently we have the capacity to conduct up to 300 tests per day, but we are working... so that by the last day of the incubation period, February 18, we will be able to test up to 1,000," government spokesman Yoshihide Suga told reporters at a regular briefing.

The ship is expected to remain in quarantine until February 19—two weeks days after the isolation period began. Officials do not expect new cases to affect this schedule.

Aside from the cruise ship, Japan has identified 28 cases—including at least nine from evacuation flights that brought Japanese citizens out of the Chinese city of Wuhan, where the virus originated.

Some of the passengers evacuated from Wuhan are expected to be released from quarantine soon—possibly by Wednesday evening.

Separately, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced that Japan was expanding its ban on travellers to Zhejiang province. Previously, a ban was imposed only on passengers from Hubei region, the disease's epicentre.

Despite the anxiety on board, one passenger praised the Italian captain for keeping stress levels manageable aboard the ship.

"One reason why a panic has not occurred among passengers is the captain's leadership. Regular announcements of information, answering passengers' requests by consulting quarantine officers, walking on the deck, apologising for delayed medicine distribution," the passenger tweeted.

"I want this kind of man to be our country's leader."

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