

“It should be fine, we hope”

Trump dismisses hantavirus threat as outbreak spreads

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Asked Thursday evening about the hantavirus outbreak that has killed three people, sickened at least eight more and dispersed dozens of potentially exposed travelers across more than a dozen countries, US President Donald Trump told reporters: “It’s very much, we hope, under control. It was the ship, and I think we’re going to make a full report about it tomorrow. We have a lot of people, it’s a lot of great people that are studying it, and it should be fine, we hope.” Pressed on whether Americans should be concerned about further spread: “I hope not. I mean, I hope not. We’ll do the best we can.”

Trump’s promised “full report” had not materialized as of Friday evening. What had materialized was a flashback to early 2020 so acute that even the bourgeois press could not avoid the parallel.

In the early weeks of what would become the COVID-19 pandemic, Trump told the public the coronavirus was “very much under control,” that US case counts would soon be “close to zero,” and that the virus would “go away” of its own accord. More than 1.5 million Americans have since been struck down by COVID-19. Globally, more than 30 million have died, more than 400 million suffer from Long COVID, and the virus continues to circulate and evolve into new variants. The same president, with even more dangerous officials around him, is once again telling the public to “hope.”

In the past 24 hours, the hantavirus outbreak has continued to extend beyond the MV Hondius cruise ship. Spanish health authorities announced Friday that a 32-year-old woman in Alicante had been hospitalized with mild respiratory symptoms after sitting two rows behind the index case’s wife on the April 25 KLM flight from Johannesburg to Amsterdam. The Dutch woman was removed from that flight when her condition deteriorated and died the following day. Spain’s Secretary of State for Health, Javier Padilla, told reporters that authorities were “confident” the Alicante patient would test negative, as had a KLM flight attendant

from the same flight whose case the WHO confirmed Friday as negative.

More epidemiologically significant is the new suspected case announced Friday by the UK Health Security Agency on Tristan da Cunha, the remote South Atlantic island where the Hondius stopped April 13 to 15. The patient is described as an “islander,” not a Hondius passenger or crew member. If confirmed, this would be the first suspected secondary infection among a population that was not aboard the ship.

Eyewitness accounts reveal that the ship’s officers allowed passengers and crew to mingle freely with the islanders despite the death of the index case two days earlier. The captain told passengers the morning after the death that the ship was “safe.” Ruhi Cenet, a Turkish travel vlogger aboard, told AFP: “I wish we did not land there after the first casualty, because along with us, there were a hundred more passengers, and they were interacting with the islanders.”

The Hondius is expected to arrive at the port of Granadilla, Tenerife, in the early hours of Sunday, May 10, where it will anchor offshore and transfer passengers by small boats to a cordoned-off section of the airport. A CDC team is being dispatched to meet the 17 Americans aboard who will be flown back on a charter aircraft fitted with a biocontainment unit and quarantined at the National Quarantine Unit in Nebraska. Six US states are monitoring previously disembarked passengers; none has yet reported symptoms, though the incubation period for hantavirus is up to eight weeks.

The operational response is being conducted by career staff at the CDC, by Spanish, Dutch and German hospitals, and by WHO technical officers. Above them, the political leadership of the United States is silent or worse. Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the long-time anti-vaccine quack, has not addressed the outbreak. Acting CDC Director Jay Bhattacharya, co-author of the Great Barrington Declaration that supplied the ideological foundation for the bipartisan “let it rip” pandemic policy, has held no press

conference. The public-health apparatus that once provided at least a modicum of friction against Trump's nostrums has been deliberately demolished.

In a comment provided to the *World Socialist Web Site*, Dr. Peter Daszak, the zoonotic disease researcher who has himself been the target of a fascistic political witch-hunt culminating in the destruction of EcoHealth Alliance, situated the Trump response within the broader assault on outbreak-response capacity. While the risk of further hantavirus spread is limited compared to more transmissible diseases, Daszak said, "public health isn't just about preventing and controlling a disease spread—the fear of an outbreak is also a problem, and we can see that around the world—from the dock workers in Spain, through to public health agencies in the USA where travelers have now returned home. Meanwhile, here in the USA, the Trump administration has systematically dismantled our ability to deal with outbreaks. They've put vaccine deniers and people directly opposed to outbreak containment measures like Bhattacharya and Kennedy in key positions of power, fired thousands of NIH and CDC employees, terminated federal funding like the NIAID (National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases) CREID (Centers for Research in Emerging Infectious Diseases) grants, and even gone as far as arresting scientists who fought the last pandemic."

The dockworkers Daszak referred to are those at Santa Cruz de Tenerife, who held a protest Friday against the Spanish government's decision—taken over the objections of the regional Canary Islands president—to allow the ship to disembark its passengers in their port. Their banners read, "Workers of Tenerife port—TPT—Respect Tenerife—we are not second-class." A port worker told Reuters: "The problem is not working at the harbour itself, the problem is for them to have contact with people living here on the island."

Daszak's reference to the terminated CREID grants is not abstract. *Scientific American* reported Friday that the Centers for Research in Emerging Infectious Diseases (CREID)—established in 2020 to study pathogens that jump from animals to humans—was shut down by NIH on June 5, 2025. One of the 10 centers had been running a pilot project specifically studying how the Andes strain of hantavirus—the strain now confirmed in the Hondius cluster—passes from rodents to humans. Eleven months later, the same strain is being air-evacuated to a biocontainment unit in Omaha.

Daszak's broader scientific point exposes the falsity of reassurances from US officials and the WHO. Zoonotic emerging diseases like COVID-19, hantavirus and monkeypox, he said, "are rising exponentially—They're emerging more often, spreading more quickly, making people sicker faster, and crashing our economies as they do.

The right-wing response of denying this, burying our head in the sand, and worse still demolishing our defenses against them, is as dumb-as-a-rock and will lead to illness and death."

In a separate comment, scientist Philipp Markolin, who appeared in the documentary *Blame* and has authored a book on the origins of COVID-19, told the WSWS that the Hondius outbreak "is a stark reminder of widening fractures and weaknesses in our pandemic preparedness." Public health authorities, he said, face "an emerging zoonotic pathogen whose nature and transmission dynamics are at best incompletely understood," in an environment "where scientific data, decision authority and institutional trust is severely limited."

Markolin then turned to the public-facing dimension. "We now have a public and information environment primed to draw from COVID-19 experiences quick and false analogies meeting a willing and well-oiled machinery of alternative medicine grifters, influencers and crises entrepreneurs ready to make use of the uncertain situation" by selling "everything from supplements to ivermectin." The wider public, he said, is "left to their own devices." The outbreak, he concluded, is "an easy trial run and limited preview into our next pandemic crises response" in which "there is unfortunately not much to feel confident about."

The MV Hondius cluster may yet be contained, but the institutional and scientific catastrophe surrounding it will not be. The initial response of the Trump administration and authorities internationally to the hantavirus outbreak makes clear that when the next pathogen arrives with COVID-like or greater transmissibility—and the science is unanimous that it will—nothing will be done to prevent its transmission or the avoidable deaths of tens of millions more.

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges workers, scientists, public health experts and all those alarmed by the hantavirus outbreak and the broader war on science to contact us by filling out the form below, to share your experiences and thoughts on this deepening crisis.



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