

P&O PACIFIC SUN CRUISE — VIRUS OUTBREAK

2427. Mr D.A. Templeman to the Minister for Health

I refer to the reported outbreak of the Norovirus on the P&O Pacific Sun Cruise which travelled from Fremantle to Indonesia and return from 4 January 2010 to 20 January 2010, and ask:

- (a) was the Department of Health or the Minister's office advised by the ship that there had been an outbreak of the virus and that many people had become ill;
  - (i) if yes, when were the Minister and the Department informed;
- (b) why did the Department of Health not quarantine the ship on its arrival back to Fremantle Port on 20 January 2010?
- (c) why did the Department of Health allow the ship to commence a new cruise on 20 January 2010 when so many people had fallen ill during the 4 January 2010 – 20 January 2010 cruise;
- (d) given that the ship was in port at Fremantle for a number of hours on 20 January 2010, was it inspected by Department of Health officers; and
  - (i) if not, why not;
- (e) has the Department of Health been informed by the cruise ship operator of any details regarding the cause of such widespread illness amongst passengers on this cruise; and
- (f) has the Department of Health contacted the cruise operator regarding this particular cruise and details regarding the cause of such widespread illness amongst passengers?

Dr K.D. HAMES replied:

- (a) Yes.
  - (i) The Department of Health was informed on 13 January 2010 while the ship was still at sea.
- (b) This was not necessary. The Department of Health did not quarantine the ship when it arrived in Fremantle because:
  - norovirus is not a quarantinable or prescribed disease (as per the Commonwealth *Quarantine Act 1911*);
  - typically, norovirus causes a relatively mild form of gastroenteritis of short (24-48 hours) duration; and
  - norovirus is a common cause of gastroenteritis in Western Australia and levels of transmission in the community were already high in December 2009 and January 2010. Hence, the introduction of ill people from the ship into the community would not be expected to increase significantly the level of norovirus transmission or the risk to individuals within the community.Nonetheless, to reduce the risk of ongoing transmission, all passengers were given information that those ill with gastroenteritis at the time of or following disembarkation should stay home, avoid contact with others, and practice good hygiene.
- (c) The Department of Health was satisfied with the level of cleaning, sanitising and infection control procedures in place on the ship during the voyage. Additionally, on arrival at Fremantle, extra teams of cleaning staff came on board to continue the cleaning and sanitisation. Cruise ships, including the Pacific Sun, have well-established protocols for responding to outbreaks of norovirus gastroenteritis.
- (d) Yes. Department of Health staff from the Communicable Disease Control Directorate visited the ship when it docked at Fremantle and had meetings with the ship's doctor and infection control staff.
  - (i) Not applicable.
- (e) Yes. The causal organism of the outbreak was identified as norovirus using diagnostic test kits available on the ship. It is believed that the virus was introduced to the ship by passengers who were infected during a restaurant meal in an overseas city during a stop-over tour. Norovirus is highly transmissible and the continued spread of illness was likely to be due to person-to-person transmission.
- (f) Yes. The Department of Health was in constant contact with cruise operator staff both during and after the outbreak and those staff are aware of the likely source of the norovirus outbreak.