

# CDC and Cruise Ship Sanitation: Protecting the Public's Health

Learn how the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Vessel Sanitation Program (VSP) helps the cruise industry protect the health of travelers and prevent transmission of gastrointestinal illness to U.S. ports.

## VSP

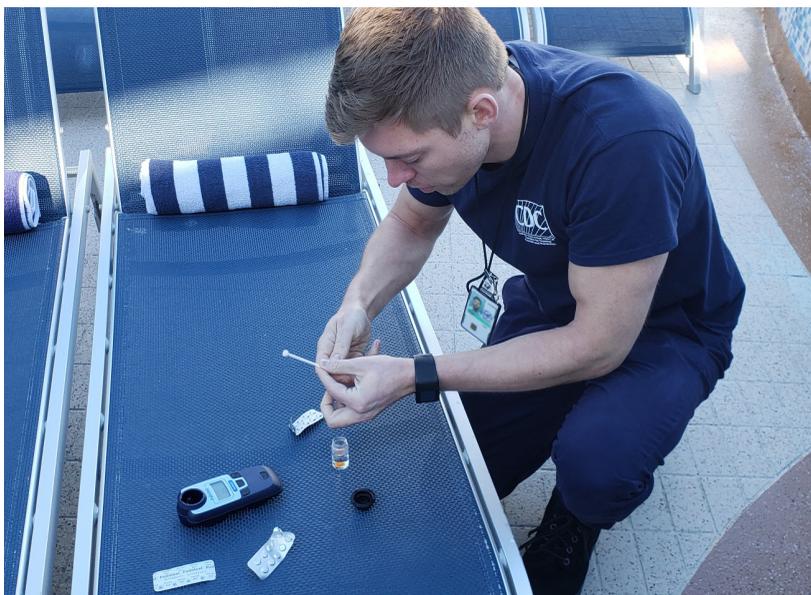
- Inspects cruise ships.
- Monitors gastrointestinal illnesses on cruise ships and investigates or responds to outbreaks.
- Trains cruise ship supervisors on public health practices.
- Provides health education and reliable and current public health information to the cruise ship industry, the traveling public, and others.

User service fees fund VSP. Cruise ship owners pay a fee based on the ship's size for sanitation inspections conducted by Environmental Health Officers of the U.S. Public Health Service.

## Did You Know?

Not all cruise ships are under VSP's jurisdiction.

Only ships that carry 13 or more passengers and have a foreign itinerary with U.S. ports are under VSP jurisdiction.



## Inspecting Cruise Ships Sanitation Inspections

VSP inspects ships in U.S. ports. Unannounced sanitation inspections assess how well ships operate and maintain sanitation standards in accordance with the current *VSP Operations Manual*.

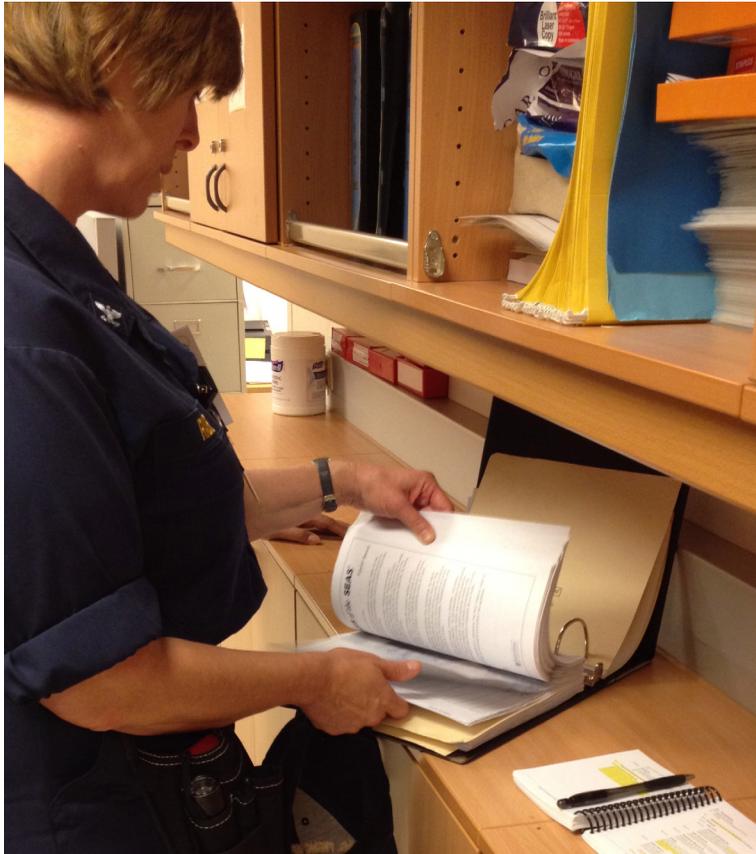
VSP inspectors provide public health guidance to cruise ship staff when standards are out of compliance. At the end of inspections, inspectors write a report describing inspection findings and recommendations. The program posts inspection reports on the VSP website.

## Construction and Renovation Inspections

VSP provides consultation at cruise line request during cruise ship construction and renovation. VSP evaluates ship designs to eliminate environmental health risks and incorporate modifications that create healthy environments. The current *VSP Construction Guidelines* provide the basis for construction inspections.



U.S. Department of  
Health and Human Services  
Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention



## Monitoring Gastrointestinal Illness and Investigating Outbreaks

### Gastrointestinal Illness Monitoring

Cruise ship medical staff send gastrointestinal illness case reports to VSP at specific times during voyages. VSP monitors reports of gastrointestinal illness to determine if a high number of people are sick.

### Outbreak Investigations

During an outbreak investigation, VSP works with cruise ship staff and the cruise line to determine the cause of illness. When an outbreak occurs, VSP asks for logs and records, including gastrointestinal illness surveillance logs, and closely examines information about the reported cases. Surveillance logs include information such as specific symptoms and the date and time the illness occurred.

By determining the cause of an outbreak, VSP can help the cruise line develop effective intervention strategies to prevent recurrence of the outbreak.

## Training Cruise Ship Employees

The program's Environmental Health Officers provide a 2.5-day training course to teach cruise ship supervisors the public health practices specified in the current *VSP Operations Manual*. During the course, attendees can ask specific questions about VSP requirements and how those requirements relate to their work.



Find cruise ship inspection reports, illness prevention tips, information on VSP outbreak investigations, and more at <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/vsp>