

Letter of 8 May 2026 from the Minister of Health, Welfare and Sport and the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the House of Representatives on the medical evacuation of the cruise ship MV *Hondius* and the designation of Andes virus as a category A2 infectious disease

On Wednesday 6 May 2026, the House was informed about the situation concerning the Dutch cruise ship MV *Hondius* and its intention to sail to Tenerife after departing Cabo Verde. This letter informs the House of the latest developments and the designation of Andes virus as a category A2 infectious disease.

This is, of course, an extremely upsetting and stressful situation for the people on board the ship and their families, so the government is working hard with all parties involved to resolve the matter as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, there have also been fatalities. The government believes it is important to acknowledge this. It extends its deepest sympathies to the bereaved and wishes them great strength.

The government understands that the situation is also raising questions and concerns among people in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) stresses that the risk of people contracting Andes virus is very low. This is because Andes virus spreads primarily through contact with mouse and rat faeces. The likelihood of the virus spreading from human to human is extremely low. Transmission can occur only when people are in close contact with one another for a prolonged period. This makes it a very different virus from coronavirus, which is many times more contagious. However, if people do contract the virus, it can have serious consequences, with a high fatality rate among those who fall ill. Treatment is primarily supportive, for example through intravenous drips and respiratory assistance.

Continuation of the voyage

On Wednesday 6 May the ship departed for the Canary Islands and is expected to arrive in Tenerife on the morning of Sunday 10 May. The Spanish authorities have said that they are prepared to receive the ship. They will carefully examine whether those on board are showing symptoms of illness, in consultation with the doctors (sent by the Netherlands) and epidemiologists (brought in at the Netherlands' request) who are already on board. They have stated that it is essential that a clear follow-up plan is in place for everyone leaving the ship, covering transport to their country of origin or another country, and reception there.

Medical evacuation of sick passengers

There are currently no people on the ship showing symptoms of illness. In the event that anyone on board does fall ill, Spain has asked the EU Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) to keep a medevac aircraft equipped with high consequence infectious disease (HCID) facilities on standby. The Spanish crisis coordinator has stated that this will cover air transport for anyone who may need to be medically evacuated. In addition, one HCID bed is available in Tenerife. There is ongoing contact with the doctors on board, who will immediately inform the Spanish authorities of any new cases of illness. In that event the UCPM medevac aircraft will be sent to Tenerife so that on the ship's arrival the sick person can be rapidly transported by air to the European mainland.

Controlled departure of passengers without symptoms

As soon as possible following the ship's arrival in Tenerife, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, working in close cooperation with the Spanish authorities, the ship's operator and the relevant ministries in the Netherlands, will arrange for repatriation subject to medical parameters of all

Dutch passengers (and where necessary Dutch crew members) on board the MV *Hondius*. The medical parameters are being developed by RIVM on the basis of advice provided by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). In this regard the ECDC makes no distinction between low-risk and high-risk contacts, which means that the same advice will apply to all persons. Both RIVM and the ECDC have stated that as many people as possible should depart the ship in Tenerife. Passengers and crew members will be flown to Eindhoven Airport. An inventory is currently being made, in consultation with the Spanish authorities and the ship's operator, of which passengers and crew members are to be collected from Tenerife. The Netherlands, like the Spanish authorities and the European Commission, is in close contact with a large number of countries that have one or more of their nationals on board the ship. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is also in contact with the relatives of the Dutch nationals on board in order to keep them informed of developments.

Quarantine of passengers and crew members

On the advice of RIVM, Dutch passengers and crew members without symptoms will quarantine at home. According to current ECDC guidelines the quarantine period should be six weeks. Various international consultations, broader in scope than the EU, are currently under way in order to reach consensus on the precise duration of the quarantine period. In the meantime the Netherlands will follow the ECDC's guidelines. For the time being, therefore, this means a period of six weeks from the last high-risk contact. The individuals on board the ship will of course be given more detailed information soon. Those individuals' local municipal health services (GGDs) will actively monitor this process, and will also provide support to these individuals during the quarantine period. In order for the quarantine measure to be imposed, Andes virus must be designated a category A2 infectious disease (See 'Designation of Andes virus as an infectious disease'). In addition, active and meticulous monitoring will be performed by the GGDs. Any suspicion of illness will be followed by referral to a university hospital for diagnostic procedures.

Since the ship is sailing under the Dutch flag, it is possible that, in addition to the Dutch passengers and crew members, the Netherlands may also provide temporary reception for people of other nationalities. These individuals will also be kept in quarantine, for a period, in principle, of six weeks after the last high-risk contact with an infected patient. RIVM has stated that such a reception operation can be arranged. The GGD of the municipality where such individuals are located will remain in contact with these non-Dutch nationals. The Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and RIVM are working closely with the relevant GGDs on the implementation of the quarantine process. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is investigating, in consultation with the ship's operator, whether there are any entry requirements or obstacles with respect to the passengers and crew.

A team from the Dutch embassy in Madrid and a number of staff of the Rapid Deployment Consular Support Team will be present to receive Dutch nationals safely and coordinate their onward travel in a controlled manner. In the Netherlands, staff of RIVM and the GGDs will be responsible for safe reception and transportation in the Netherlands.

RIVM advisory report

RIVM has advised that the reporting requirement for Andes virus be amended to a category A2 infectious disease. For the other orthohantaviruses, category C will continue to suffice. This advice is being followed. According to RIVM, this amendment is necessary because Andes virus can cause serious illness associated with a high mortality rate (20-35%). In addition, there are indications that Andes virus can be transmitted by human-to-human contact, and that such

transmission can occur before symptoms develop. For these reasons, RIVM believes it is important, in the interest of protecting public health, to be able to impose measures, such as isolation and quarantine, on a patient and individuals with whom they have had contact. Adding Andes virus to category A2 makes these measures possible. Lastly, RIVM has stated that there is no reason to suppose that Andes virus will lead to a pandemic. There are thus no grounds to designate Andes virus a category A1 infectious disease. It should be emphasised that the measures described here are not collective measures, such as those taken during the COVID-19 pandemic. The RIVM advisory report is appended to this letter.

Ministerial order

On the basis of this advisory report, and in coordination with the cabinet, a ministerial order has been drawn up, designating Andes virus a category A2 infectious disease. This order will enter into force today immediately after its publication. The ministerial order is appended to this letter.

Conclusion

The government will continue working with all parties concerned (at both national and international level) and will follow the situation closely. The government will of course update the House as new developments emerge.