

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

## Despite vaccination requirements, luxury cruises hit by COVID infections

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*Cunard is changing its cruise itineraries. Image credit: Cunard*

By LUXURY DAILY NEWS SERVICE

Nearly 100 cruise ships are being monitored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for COVID-19 outbreaks, underscoring how travel during the pandemic remains complicated.

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Ships hit the CDC's threshold for investigation once 0.1 percent of passengers test positive for COVID-19, which is no more than seven cases for the largest cruises. While it is unlikely that there will be an industry shutdown similar to the early months of the pandemic, the current situation illustrates how quickly the Omicron variant can spread among travelers even with vaccination requirements in place.

"Omicron is having a big short-term impact on everyone, but many observers see this as a major step towards COVID-19 becoming endemic rather than epidemic," said Richard Fain, chairman and CEO at Royal Caribbean Group, in a statement.

"We don't like to see even one case, but our experience is a fraction of the comparable statistics of virtually any other comparable location or industry," he said. "Few businesses are subject to such intense scrutiny, regulation, and disclosure requirements by so many authorities, and we welcome that scrutiny because of our commitment to safety."

Royal Caribbean Group is the owner and operator of three cruise lines, including Silversea Cruises.

Cruise challenges

As of press time, the CDC is monitoring or investigating 92 cruise ships operating or planning to operate in U.S. waters.

The luxury ships under investigation or monitoring include Cunard's Queen Mary 2; Crystal's Serenity and Symphony; Regent Seven Seas' Explorer, Navigator and Splendor; Silversea's Silver Spirit and Silver Whisper and the Seabourn Ovation.

Queen Mary 2 is **reportedly** skipping a scheduled visit to New York, with Cunard opting to extend the ocean liner's stay in Barbados as it awaits the arrival of additional crew members. The ship had departed the United Kingdom on

Dec. 13.



*Silversea has COVID-19 vaccination requirements in place. Image credit: Silversea Cruises*

Cunard has also cancelled scheduled departures for Queen Elizabeth from Feb. 20 through May 17, citing complexities in sailing to Asia.

Many luxury cruises only resumed sailing in recent months, with several brands setting strict vaccination requirements for passengers.

In July, a U.S. federal appeals court blocked an order from a lower court that would have allowed cruise ships to sail from the state of Florida without mandating rules from the CDC intended to prevent future COVID-19 outbreaks during voyages.

The situation had pitted cruise companies including Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings, owner of Regent Seven Seas Cruises and the CDC against Florida Governor Ron DeSantis. The state had argued that the CDC's Conditional Sail Order, which established a four-phase process for companies to resume sailing, is too burdensome and hinders one of Florida's most valuable industries ([see story](#)).

"We intend to maintain our goal of delivering the safest vacation on land or sea and will constantly adjust our procedures to accomplish this even in the face of Omicron's amazing transmissibility," Mr. Fain said.

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