

Cruise ships: CDC has warned against cruise ship travel

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Princess would not dock March 31. The ship was quarantined off the coast of California and later in Oakland after a former passenger became the state's first confirmed death from coronavirus.

Astoria, Clatsop County and the Port announced on Thursday that no cruise ship visits will be allowed through April 10, citing Brown's announcement and warnings by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention against cruise ship travel.

The announcement cancels a scheduled visit April 4 by the Celebrity Eclipse of Celebrity Cruises.

"Additionally, in the absence of specific policy on cruise ships from higher authority, we have agreed to consider cruise ships as public gatherings and will cancel all visits of cruise (ships) with greater than 250 persons aboard as long as the state prohibitions remain in place," Astoria Mayor Bruce Jones, Commissioner Kathleen Sullivan, the chairwoman of the county Board of Commissioners, and Will Isom, the executive director of the Port, said in a statement.

Princess Cruises on Thursday canceled all cruise ship voyages scheduled to start May 10 or earlier. The cancellation covers visits to Astoria by the Star Princess on April 12, Ruby Princess on May 6 and Grand Princess on May 7.

"It is our intention to reassure our loyal guests, team members and global stakeholders of our commitment to the health, safety and well-being of all who sail with us, as well as those who do business with us, and the countries and com-

munities we visit around the world," Jan Swartz, president of Princess Cruises, said in a news release.

Jones said that health issues surrounding visiting cruise ships affect the entire county, rather than just Astoria and the Port.

"Because of this, our three entities have been working closely together to develop unified policy and decisions," he said. "We are leaning forward to put public health first where there is a gap in state policy."

Princess Cruises' announcement and Brown's ban on large gatherings have so far cut the amount of ships visiting Astoria down to at most 30. Bruce Conner, the Port's cruise ship marketer, said that aside from Princess Cruises' announcement, there have been no ship cancellations beyond April 10.

Astoria's next scheduled cruise ship visit would be the Eurodam from the Holland America Line on April 13.

The coronavirus has reinvigorated the debate over whether to continue allowing large cruise ships to dock in Astoria.

Sarah Jane Bardy, owner of the Eleventh Street Barber, recently started an online petition asking the City Council to halt the cruise ship visits. She argued that the passengers don't contribute much to the local economy and put the region's most vulnerable populations at increased risk of sickness.

"Astoria has become a tourist destination in an of itself with tens of thousands of people traveling here by way of car and bus every year," she wrote. "We, unlike isolated towns such as Kodiak, Alaska, do not rely on ships to support our economy."

Elderly: 'It feels like everything's up in the air'

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If there is a local case of the virus, Elder said, "It will change everything."

Local organizations, especially those that serve senior populations, are falling back on protocols usually reserved for the height of flu season — and then taking a few extra precautions.

Staff at First Lutheran Church, where the bulk of regularly attending congregants are older, wipe down surfaces between the church's two Sunday worship services. They have also changed how food is served at community meals.

Sunday afternoon services conducted by a rotating group of North Coast pastors at Clatsop Retirement Village have been suspended.

The Astoria Senior Center has started asking nonmembers to provide emergency contact information if they want to use the center's services. If the virus shows up, senior center staff need to be able to contact anyone who might have been exposed, said Larry Miller, the center's executive director.

He is looking at installing another hand sanitizer dispenser and has asked the center's custodian to regularly wipe down door handles and other high-touch surfaces.

"No. 1, though," Miller said, "I'm not panicking."

Nor are many of the seniors The Astorian spoke with during a recent afternoon at the center.

Several who had gathered to play the tile-based game mahjong are dealing with autoimmune issues. Aggressive hand-washing and vigilance against exposure to illness have long been a part of their routine.

One woman with an autoimmune disorder said she considered not coming to the center, but she had felt isolated after a bout of illness in January. The social interaction was worth the risk, she decided. Her husband was



Katie Frankowicz/The Astorian
Christine Teeter, center, participates in a beginning line dancing class at the Astoria Senior Center. The center is taking extra precautions in light of the coronavirus, but remains open.

really opposed to it, though, she said.

"Well that's a reason to go, isn't it?" another player joked.

The flu season is a regular, deadly occurrence and people don't stop their lives every January and February when it's at its height, others noted.

Some people had canceled travel plans. Others held off, hoping conditions would improve by the time they were scheduled to leave.

Lynne Kelton, 66, of Warrenton, is one of the latter. She was frugal when she made arrangements to travel with her daughter to Charleston, South Carolina, and Nashville, Tennessee, and bought cheaper, nonrefundable tickets.

She keeps thinking, "Maybe it will be over in five weeks."

But Kelton is also dealing with another dilemma related to the virus. Her 95-year-old mother, who suffers from dementia, was just transferred to a care facility near Portland. Restrictions from the state severely limit who can visit residents.

"She's not going to understand why I'm not coming to visit her," Kelton said. "I know it's the right thing, but

it feels like everything's up in the air."

Yaeko Carr, 85, has continued to attend classes and events at the senior center over her son's objections. He would prefer she stayed

away, she said.

Carr, who lives in Astoria, looks around at the other people in a beginning line dancing class on Wednesday: No one's coughing. Though some people stop dancing to take a quick break on the sidelines, everyone seems energetic, enthusiastic, healthy.

However, Carr has decided to stop visiting a 102-year-old friend who lives at Clatsop Care Center, worried that she could inadvertently pass along the illness.

"I told her I'm not coming for a while," Carr said.

Despite her confidence, she does wonder if she should be exposing herself to the possibility of illness by going out to places like the senior center. Her doctor tells her that she is in excellent health.

"But still," Carr said, "you never know how your health is going to change."



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