HEALTH SURVEILLANCE ON CRUISE SHIPS DURING THE SYDNEY 2000 OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES

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During the Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games, nine cruise ships will be berthed in Sydney Harbour, acting as floating hotels for an estimated 32,000 guests. Outbreaks of disease including gastroenteritis, Legionnaire’s disease, influenza, and tuberculosis (TB) are well documented aboard cruise ships, as well as the closed environment aboard the ships may promote the occurrence of outbreaks of disease that can affect large numbers of individuals. During the Games, there is also a potential for outbreaks of disease to occur from sources outside cruise ships but affecting ships’ passengers.

This article describes the plans for health surveillance on cruise ships during the Games, which will be an important component of the larger Olympic Health Surveillance System (OHSS). The overall OHSS is described in the article by Thackway on page 142, while the NSW Vessel Inspection Program, a hygienic inspection regimen for cruise ships, is described in the article by Banwell and Butler et al. (page 148).

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During the Games, health surveillance on cruise ships will have two reporting streams (see Figure 5):

- Notifiable Disease Reporting (NDR)
- Cruise Ship Olympic Surveillance System (CSOSS).

Notifiable Disease Reporting

During the Games period, all cruise ships will be required to comply with the NSW Public Health Act and Regulations (1991), and notify the NSW Department of Health of:

- outbreaks of gastroenteritis
- two or more linked cases of food poisoning
- other notifiable diseases.

Cruise Ship Medical Officers will report any notifiable diseases, unusual disease clusters or public health-related problems to the Olympic Medical Epidemiologist (see article by Banwell and Butler et al. on page 148). The Medical Epidemiologist will then advise the appropriate public health agency (see Figure 5).
Cruise Ship Olympic Surveillance System
The Cruise Ship Olympic Surveillance System (CSOSS) is designed to enhance the existing notifiable diseases reporting system, and to actively identify unusual patterns of illness and disease on cruise ships. This surveillance mechanism builds on a reporting system operated by the South Eastern Sydney Public Health Unit and Sydney-based cruise vessel operators.

During the Games, cruise ship medical staff will be requested to complete an Olympic Cruise Ship Daily Medical Report for inclusion into the NSW Department of Health’s OHSS. This daily report outlines the number of passengers on each ship, the number of medical consultations, hospitalisations, deaths and cases with the following specific symptoms and conditions:

- influenza-like illness
- suspected pneumonia
- gastroenteritis.

The summary report forms will be faxed daily to the Department of Health, and analysed and reported through the NSW Health Olympic Coordinating Centre (HOCC). The Olympic Medical Epidemiologist will be notified immediately of any acute health concerns or cases showing unusual symptoms of possible public health significance.

The large number of cruise ships that will converge in Sydney for the Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games has presented a unique opportunity to develop and test a comprehensive system for surveillance of health on these vessels. It is hoped that the Sydney experience will inform planning for the next Olympic Games in Athens in 2004, which will be serviced by a much greater number of cruise ships.

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REFERENCES