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## Hundreds of Americans flown home from cruise ship, 14 with coronavirus



People wearing face masks walk inside a subway station, as the country is hit by an outbreak of the novel coronavirus, in Shanghai, China February 17, 2020. REUTERS/Aly Song

TRAVIS AIR FORCE BASE, Calif./GENEVA (Reuters) - More than 300 American cruise liner passengers, including 14 who tested positive for coronavirus, were flown home to military bases in the United States after two weeks under quarantine off Japan.

The cruise ship Diamond Princess, which with more than 400 cases has by far the largest cluster outside China, has become the biggest test so far of other countries' ability to contain an outbreak that has killed 1,770 people in China and five elsewhere.

A ground crew in anti-contamination suits met the chartered jet that touched down at Joint Base San Antonio in Texas, and passengers could be seen climbing down the stairs wearing face masks in the pre-dawn mist. Another flight landed at Travis Air Force Base in California hours earlier.

All the passengers were taken into a two-week quarantine.

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Although U.S. officials had said passengers with coronavirus symptoms would not be repatriated, 14 passengers found at the last minute to have tested positive were permitted to board the planes. The U.S. State Department said the infected passengers were kept in isolation on the flights.

Across mainland China, officials said the total number of coronavirus cases rose by 2,048 to 70,548. That was slightly more new cases than were reported on Sunday, but hundreds fewer than reported on Saturday.

Chinese authorities say the stabilisation in the numbers is a sign that measures taken to halt the spread of the disease are having an effect.

However, epidemiologists say it is probably still too early to say how well the outbreak is being contained within China and its central Hubei province, where the virus first appeared. Official figures of new cases have levelled off in the past, only to jump suddenly after changes in methodology.

"The real issue is whether we are seeing efficient community transmission outside of China and at the present time we are not observing that," Mike Ryan, head of World Health Organization's emergencies program, said at a news conference in Geneva.

China has responded to the COVID-19 virus by locking down Hubei's provincial capital Wuhan, a megacity of 11 million people, and imposing restrictions in a number of other cities. But the ruling Communist Party is also under pressure to prevent the economy from crashing and get people back to work. China's central bank cut the interest rate on its medium-term lending on Monday, which is expected to pave the way for a reduction in the benchmark loan prime rate on Thursday. Beijing has also announced plans for cuts in taxes and fees.

Even so, economists expect China's economic growth to slow. Ratings agency Moody's on Monday lowered its 2020 GDP growth forecast to 5.2%, making it likely China would miss a goal to double GDP over the decade to 2020.

People wearing face masks walk inside a subway station, as the country is hit by an outbreak of the novel coronavirus, in Shanghai, China February 17, 2020. REUTERS/Aly Song

### CRUISE SHIPS

Around half of all known cases of the virus outside China have been found aboard the Diamond Princess, which was ordered to stay under quarantine at the port of Yokohama on Feb. 3. Several other countries have announced plans to follow the United States in bringing passengers home. Around half of the 3,700 passengers and crew are Japanese.

Matthew Smith, an American passenger who remained on the ship after refusing to board the voluntary repatriation flights, tweeted that staying behind was the "best decision ever".

"US Gov't said they would not put anyone on the planes who was symptomatic, and they ended up knowingly and intentionally putting on 14 people who actually have the virus," he wrote

Authorities around the world were also trying to track down passengers from another cruise liner, the Westerdam, which was turned away from ports across Southeast Asia for two weeks before docking in Cambodia on Thursday.

One American passenger who disembarked in Cambodia tested positive for the virus in Malaysia on Saturday.

Carnival Corp., which operates both cruise liners, said it was cooperating with authorities in trying to trace other passengers from the Westerdam. None of the other 1,454 passengers and 802 crew had reported any symptoms, it said. ship or in hotels.

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# Chinese support measures buoy world stocks

LONDON (Reuters) - Global shares were buoyant on Monday as the promise of further policy stimulus from China to counteract the economic hit from a coronavirus outbreak calmed nervous investors.

Trading was light, with U.S. stocks and bond markets shut for a public holiday.

Both the pan-European STOXX 600 index and Germany's DAX reached record highs before paring some gains. [EU] The MSCI All-Country World Index, which tracks shares across 47 countries, was flat on the day.

In Asia, MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan advanced 0.14% to near last week's peak of 558.30, its highest since late January.

The gains were led by China, whose blue-chip index climbed 2.25% after the country's central bank lowered a key interest rate and injected more liquidity into the system.

Also whetting risk appetite was an announcement by China's finance minister on Sunday that Beijing would roll out tax and fee cuts.

"Traders are mindful of the fact the Chinese authorities intervened in the financial markets at the beginning of the month, when the domestic stock markets reopened after the Lunar New Year celebrations," said David Madden, market analyst at CMC Markets in London.

"Some dealers hold the view that Beijing will intervene in the markets again should the situation get much worse, which could explain the resilience of equity markets."



FILE PHOTO: The German share price index DAX graph is pictured at the stock exchange in Frankfurt, Germany, February 14, 2020. REUTERS/Staff/File Photo

Fears about the jolt to the world economy from the coronavirus lingered, though, as the number of reported new cases in China rose to 2,048 as on Sunday from 2,009 the previous day.

"The latest numbers from the Hubei province still suggest that the infection pace is slowing after the sudden jump following the methodology changes last week," Danske Bank said in a research note, highlighting that the number of new cases within China

is the lowest since Jan. 23.

Restrictions were tightened further in Hubei over the weekend. Most vehicles were banned from the roads and companies told to stay shut until further notice.

Japan's Nikkei fell 0.7% after its economy shrank at the fastest pace in almost six years in the December quarter. The slowdown in the world's

third-largest economy came amid concern the coronavirus effects will hurt output and tourism, stoking fears Japan may slump into recession.

The coronavirus also led trade-dependent Singapore to downgrade its 2020 economic growth forecast. China's economy is widely expected to slow sharply as well.

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# Editor's Choice



People wear face masks and plastic raincoats as a protection from coronavirus at Shanghai railway station, in Shanghai, China February 17, 2020. REUTERS/Aly Song



People wear face masks and plastic raincoats as a protection from coronavirus at Shanghai railway station, in Shanghai, China February 17, 2020. REUTERS/Aly Song



A woman wearing protective face mask walks a street, following the outbreak of the coronavirus in China, in Kuala Lumpur



Waiters wearing protective face masks wait for customers outside a restaurant, following the outbreak of the coronavirus in China, in Kuala Lumpur



A nurse stands inside finished but still unused building A2 of the Shanghai Public Clinical Center Shanghai, following the outbreak of the new coronavirus, in Shanghai



A woman wearing protective face mask walks a street, following the outbreak of the coronavirus in China, in Kuala Lumpur



People wear protective masks as they walk a downtown street following the outbreak of the new coronavirus, in Hong Kong



Nurses walk inside a quarantine room for coronavirus patients at finished but still unused building A2 of the Shanghai Public Clinical Center, in Shanghai

## New FBI Data Shows Overall Crime Down In Houston Last Year, Violent Crime Still Up

### Houston Is The Largest U.S. Metro Area With Significant PCP Problem



Two people died in a crash involving a driver who was allegedly under the influence of PCP along the U.S. 59 service road at Kirby Monday, Oct. 15, 2012, in southwest Houston. Research found traces of PCP in 615 blood samples taken during DWI arrests between 2013 and 2018.

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

Amid a city with already troubled roads, PCP-impaired motorists are getting behind the wheel in Houston, making it the largest metro area in the nation to have a significant problem with the hallucinogen, according to a study released Wednesday.

The research found traces of PCP — formally known as Phencyclidine but also angel dust — in 615 blood samples taken during DWI arrests between 2013 and 2018, with the typical user being black men in their 30s.

The study was conducted by the Houston Forensic Science Center with hopes of reducing PCP-impaired driving in Houston. Cases not related to driving while under the influence were removed from the study.

The drug is associated with hallucinogenic and, at times, violent behavior. According to researchers, users dip cigarettes or joints into a PCP solution.

Researchers plan to elaborate on their PCP findings at a news conference on Wednesday morning.

PCP is what authorities say Gregory Al-

len Smith admitted to using prior to a Feb. 5 crash that killed three members of a family, including a 3-month-old baby. He tested positive for the drug in April 2019 after another crash that led to his first DWI arrest.

Smith, now charged with three counts of intoxication manslaughter, is slated Friday to appear in court. By then, investigators hope to have pieced together what he was doing 24 hours before the fatal wreck.

#### Related

**New FBI data: Overall crime down in Houston last year, violent crime still up**



Mayor Sylvester Turner argues with Bill King as Tony Buzbee listens during a mayoral candidate forum for

the 2019 election at the Garden Oaks Montessori Magnet school, September 2019, in Houston.

(Photo/ Houston Chronicle)

Newly released FBI data show Houston's violent crime rate has risen 6 percent during Mayor Sylvester Turner's tenure, while the rate of nonviolent crime has fallen 9 percent. The city's overall crime rate has dropped 6 percent.

The numbers, released through the bureau's Uniform Crime Reporting system, come amid an intensifying debate in the mayor's race over public safety, particularly after candidate Tony Buzbee released a TV ad showing a montage of television reports on violent crime.

Buzbee also has said that Houston has more crime than almost any other city across the country, a comparison that crime analysts said provided a flawed representation of the city's public safety issues because it compares Houston to small towns that have virtually no crime. The Houston Chronicle examined Buzbee's claims — and others by fellow candidate Bill King — and found that their assertions were not entirely supported by the facts. The paper found that Houston has experienced a significant drop in crime over the last 30 years, mirroring trends across the rest of the country. Residents' fear of crime being the city's most pressing problem has also plummeted: 70 percent of respondents in the 1990s cited the issue in the Kinder Institute's Houston Area Survey, compared with 15 percent in this year's edition of the survey.

	Murder	Rape	Aggravated Assault	Total Violent Crime	Total Property Crime
2019	113	302	6087	7502	62465
2018	110	307	5212	7541	57753
Change	3.7%	-1.6%	16.9%	-1.6%	8.3%

Source: HPD Monthly Operational Summaries (Jun-Oct 2019, 2018)

The new FBI data show that most categories of crime in Houston have decreased or remained stagnant during Turner's term, which began in January 2016.

According to the new data, the rate of murders, robberies, burglaries and thefts

have fallen — as the Chronicle initially reported — since 2015, while the rate of reported rapes and aggravated assaults has risen.

After the Chronicle's recent report, both candidates sharply criticized the paper. A Buzbee surrogate labeled the paper "the enemy." King criticized the Chronicle's reporting in light of the new data, issuing a news release saying the paper "erroneously" stated violent crime under Turner has grown 4 percent, a figure that came from preliminary FBI data cited by the city in January.

"We certainly don't need any fear-mongering about crime," King wrote in a blog post emailed to supporters. "But neither do we need anyone minimizing crime to support their political agenda. If you want a mayor that will tell you the unvarnished truth, the good and the bad, I'm your man."

King said the number of violent crimes during Turner's administration has increased 9 percent, which fails to take into account the city's population growth since 2015, the year before Turner took office. King also did not cite the FBI data showing a drop in property and overall crimes.



The higher number of violent crimes in the new data — compared with preliminary FBI data — was almost entirely driven by an uptick in aggravated assaults. The number of murders and robberies is actually lower than the city initially reported to the FBI, while the number of reported rapes rose from 1,233 to 1,261.

In 2018, the rate of violent crime was 1,026 crimes per 100,000 residents, compared with 967 in 2015. The uptick counters part of an assertion from Turner, who falsely says in the "accomplish-

ments" section of his campaign website that violent crime has dropped during his tenure.

The rate of property or nonviolent crimes fell during that span from 4,398 to 4,010, while the overall rate of crime was 5,036 per 100,000 residents — down from 5,364 the year before Turner took office. In a statement, Buzbee said he believes nonviolent crime has risen — despite FBI data indicating otherwise — because "many times people don't bother to report it because

Both candidates have firmly denied they are insulting police officers with claims about the state of crime. Buzbee, King and Turner have each said they want to hire more police officers.



The crime numbers in Houston mostly reflect a national trend of decreasing crime. From 2017 to 2018, the city saw 3 percent increases in murders and auto thefts; every other type of crime fell, and the violent crime rate fell 6 percent.

Per the FBI data, robberies, murders and aggravated assaults dropped nationwide in 2018. In Houston, the city saw a reduction in robberies and aggravated assaults that year, while murders rose from 269 to 276. More rapes were also reported, mirroring a similar national trend.

The higher aggravated assault numbers partly stem from a new system of reporting crime in which one incident involving multiple victims counts the number of victims, Police Chief Art Acevedo tweeted Friday. Under the old model, an incident involving multiple victims would count as just one incident. (Courtesy houstonchronicle.com)

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Hundreds Leave Stricken Cruise Ships

**World On Alert For Coronavirus Spread As Stranded Passengers Fly Home**



Passengers disembarking from the MS Westerdam at Sihanoukville in Cambodia on Friday, February 14, 2020. Hundreds of cruise ship passengers long stranded at sea by virus fears cheered as they finally disembarked Friday and were welcomed to Cambodia. Photo: AP

**Overview**

**600 American passengers on the MS Westerdam, one of whom was tested positive for the coronavirus, are now flying home after getting off the cruise ship. About 233 guests and 747 crew remain on the ship in Sihanoukville, out of 2,257 who were on the voyage**

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

The startling number of cases on the Diamond Princess, which accounts for the biggest cluster of coronavirus infections outside China, and the newly detected case from the Westerdam raise questions about the effectiveness of containing the virus on cruise ships.

More than 3,000 travellers on two coronavirus-stricken Carnival cruise ships are returning home, fanning out to more than 40 countries and fuelling fears of further contagion from the deadly virus. The US on Monday began evacuating its citizens from the Diamond Princess off Yokohama, Japan, where 70 new cases of the virus were confirmed over the weekend.

Canada, Hong Kong and other countries also plan similar evacuations of hundreds. On Saturday, an 83-year-old American woman tested positive in Malaysia, a day after she and more than

2,200 others were cleared to leave the cruise ship Westerdam in Cambodia. The ship arrived there after being turned away by five other ports.



The MS Westerdam cruise ship arriving at Sihanoukville port in Cambodia on February 13, 2020, after being turned away by five ports. Photo: AFP

“This woman was on the boat and was infected for a few days – she could have potentially exposed other people on the boat who have now gone home,” said Stanley Deresinski, a Stanford University professor and infectious disease specialist at the university hospital.

“There’s a possibility that anyone who is infected and asymptomatic could start a chain of infection wherever they return to.”

Those concerns have prompted a growing number of Asian countries to block the luxury liners from their ports, threatening earnings of companies like Carnival and Royal Caribbean Cruises.

“People are circulating all over, you’re using the same corridors, touching the same handles and railings. It’s easy to catch something.”



The cruise ship Diamond Princess docked at the port of Yokohama in Japan on February 7, 2020.

Photo: Kyodo

The Westerdam spent two weeks in limbo before Cambodia permitted the ship to berth on Feb. 13. Passengers were allowed to leave the next day without a quarantine, and the American woman then travelled to Kuala Lumpur to seek a flight back to the US.

Malaysia has since said it won’t allow any more travellers from the Westerdam to transit through the country, causing the cancellation of three charter flights to shuttle passengers out of Cambodia.

Health experts are raising the alarm about the Westerdam passengers after their release without a quarantine order at a time when the death toll from the

disease has topped 1,700 globally. Because the ship was at sea for the required 14-day quarantine, passengers are free to travel after they leave the ship, a US State Department spokesperson said.



Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen (centre, right) greeting Cambodian passengers as they disembarked the MS Westerdam cruise ship at Sihanoukville in Cambodia on 14 February 2020. Photo: EPA-EFE

Holland America Line – owned by Miami-based cruising giant Carnival – has maintained there was no known case of the disease during the voyage. Knowing when the American woman was infected and by whom is key to determine the risk that other passengers may come down with the virus.

The US doesn’t have “sufficient evidence” to determine when she may have been exposed or where, said the State Department spokesperson.

The infected woman was cleared to travel from Cambodia after filling out a health questionnaire and undergoing temperature checks. After she and 144 other Westerdam passengers arrived in Malaysia to transit to other flights, the woman had a fever, was coughing and had difficulty breathing.



General view of a cabin of the cruise ship Diamond Princess, where passengers are being quarantined due to coronavirus suspicions on board in Yokohama on February 6, 2020.

Photo: Reuters

Cruise ships have struggled in recent years to battle isolated outbreaks of other maladies like the norovirus, a gastrointestinal illness that’s highly contagious. Still, the quarantine of entire ships due to coronavirus is unprecedented and threatens to upend the cruise industry in Asia and beyond. Vietnam became the latest country to say it wouldn’t allow a cruise ship to dock – forcing the AIDA-vita carrying more than 1,100 European passengers to cancel its plans to visit the country.

More than 600 Americans on the Westerdam are making their way home, the biggest group by nationality. About 233 guests and 747 crew remain on the ship in Sihanoukville, Cambodia, out of 2,257 who were on the voyage, according to a Holland America Line statement.

A retired thoracic surgeon said he and his grandson plan to quarantine themselves voluntarily for 14 days after getting home.

“I don’t want to endanger my neighbours, family or friends,” he said. “Maybe everyone on this boat should go on to a quarantine. That’s the only safe way to prevent any further spread back home.” (Courtesy <https://www.scmp.com/>)

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