Tourism and Public Health: New Illnesses and Increased Sickness in American Samoa

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Despite the fact that studies have established a notable link between tourism-particularly cruise ship traffic-and increased respiratory illnesses, there is a lack of official research examining the specific impact of these diseases on developing regions such as American Samoa. In addition, limited awareness among local health professionals and community members about the associated health risks may hinder effective prevention and response efforts. Utilizing 2024 health and tourism data, alongside a community survey involving public health professionals and local residents, the findings indicate a strong correlation between cruise ship arrivals and the spread of respiratory illnesses. The data highlights Influenza B and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) as the most commonly transmitted illnesses. Survey feedback (n=128) revealed that 80% of residents believe cruise ships contribute to the introduction of diseases, while 70% agree that tourism has a negative impact on public health. Notably, despite these concerns, both community members and health professionals demonstrate strong awareness of the issue, advocating for improved health protocols, increased public education, and enhanced preparedness measures. The study concludes that although awareness is present, more proactive strategies are needed to protect public health without losing the economic benefits of tourism. Future research should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of health screenings, vaccination campaigns, and sanitation practices in mitigating disease spread.

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