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NASA Postpones Artemis II Moon Mission to March After Hydrogen Leak During Fuel Test

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NASA has delayed the launch of the Artemis II mission from early February to March 2026.

The delay was caused by a hydrogen fuel leak discovered during a major pre-launch test called a “wet dress rehearsal.”

What Is a Wet Dress Rehearsal

A wet dress rehearsal is a full practice run-through of the launch countdown where the rocket is filled with real propellants (liquid hydrogen and oxygen) just as it would be on launch day.

The test is done to make sure all systems work correctly before the real launch.

Why the Mission Was Delayed

During the rehearsal at NASA’s Kennedy Space Center, Florida, engineers encountered a leak of liquid hydrogen, which is the rocket’s fuel.

The leak appeared near a connection point between the rocket and ground fueling system and could not be fully fixed during the test.

The countdown was automatically stopped about five minutes before liftoff to keep the mission safe.

NASA also faced other small issues, including extended work on a valve in the crew module and cold-weather effects on equipment.

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What NASA Will Do Next

Engineers will review all the test data and work to fix the leak and other problems.

NASA plans to conduct another wet dress rehearsal or further testing before choosing the exact new launch date.

The new launch window now expected is in March 2026, with several possible dates under consideration.

The Artemis II astronauts will leave quarantine and then re-enter it later before the new launch window.

Why This Matters

Artemis II is NASA's first crewed lunar mission since the Apollo era, planning to send four astronauts around the Moon and back.

The mission is a key step before Artemis III, which aims to land astronauts on the Moon's South Pole.

Safety is NASA's top priority, so they want to ensure all systems are fully ready before liftoff.

Artemis II Mission:

Artemis II is NASA's first crewed mission under the Artemis programme.

It will send four astronauts around the Moon and back to Earth, without landing on the lunar surface.

The mission will test the Orion spacecraft and Space Launch System (SLS) rocket with humans on board for the first time.

Its main goal is to check safety, performance, and life-support systems in deep space.

Artemis II is a crucial step before Artemis III, which aims to land astronauts on the Moon.