

# RBG Guidance for Ship Operators for the Protection of the Health of Seafarers

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*While the advice given in this Guidance has been developed using the best information available, it is intended purely as guidance to be used at the user's own risk. No responsibility is accepted by RBG.*

# Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance for Ship-Operators for the Protection of the Health of Seafarers

## *Introduction*

This guide has been produced by RBG, based on the [ICS-COVID-19 guidance](#) to help shipping companies and seafarers follow health advice related to the COVID-19 pandemic and is intended for use on all types of ships.

COVID-19 was first reported in December 2019 in Wuhan, China and has since spread to almost every country in the world. At the time of going to print, more than 5 million cases have been reported, including over 300,000 deaths. In most cases, COVID-19 is a mild, self-limiting disease. In some cases, it can cause a more severe illness, including pneumonia and death. The time from the initial contact with the virus until symptoms develop is normally 5 to 7 days, although it can be up to 14 days.

No vaccine or specific drug treatment is currently available, and the focus of public health authorities worldwide has been to contain the virus through preventive measures, in order to limit and delay widespread transmission.

This also requires close cooperation between flag and port states, shipping companies and other maritime service providers to protect the health of seafarers and the general public.

Under the ISM Code, ship operators are required to assess all identified risks to their ships and personnel and establish appropriate safeguards. As a result, shipping companies should develop plans and procedures to address the risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic to the health of seafarers and the safety of their ship operations.

Plans and procedures to respond to the risks associated with COVID-19 may cover the following aspects:

- Information
- Shipboard measures
- Outbreak plan

## **1. Information**

### **1.1 about the coronavirus (COVID-19)**

Is the shipping company and crew informed, aware and trained in: symptoms and incubation period, transmission, personal protection, infection prevention, testing and treatment?

### **1.2 About the ports of departure and arrival**

Local restrictions, protocols and data of port state health authorities.

Wilhelmsen Ships Service has developed an interactive map on current port restrictions which is available at <https://wilhelmsen.com/ships-agency/campaigns/coronavirus/coronavirus-map>

## 2. Shipboard measures to address risks associated with COVID-19

### 2.1 Measures to protect health and prevent infection

Numerous guidelines, information brochures and information letters can be found on this topic. It is crucial to adopt ship-specific thought out protocols. Not all first impression measures can work on your ship or in your situation. I.e: why, when, where and how.

- Monitoring and screening
- Personal protective equipment
- Testing and assessment
- Shipboard self-distancing
- Cleaning and disinfection
- Hygiene protocols

### 2.2 Measures to manage risks during embarkation

- Points of attention: when do you screen? Before the journey to the ship or in the port of embarkation? What are the risks? What screening measures will you use? Will you requiring seafarers to complete a period of shipboard self-distancing (SSD) after embarkation? What elements of SSD should be followed and for what period of time? (It ought not to prejudice seafarers performing their assigned duties and responsibilities of course)

### 2.3 Measures related to passengers and others not working on board

- assessment of the risk of being infected by passengers and others who are not working on board before they are given access to the ship;
- information to external parties regarding contamination control measures that apply on board during the coronavirus pandemic;
- measures to prevent people from gathering in numbers in accordance with recommendations from the health authorities;
- need for marks/signs for informative purposes.

### 2.4 Measures related to organization of work

- organization of meals and work on board to reduce a large number of people coming together at the same time;
- sufficient number of crew members to maintain operational functions in a situation of infected cases;
- special measures or protection for employees belonging to a risk group;

### 2.5 Measures to manage risks during disembarkation

- Points of attention: the interaction with any personnel or infrastructures in the port/terminal

### 2.6 Measures to manage risks associated with the ship/shore interface

- Before a ship arrives in a port, ship operators should instruct their ships to communicate their requirements and expectations to all anticipated shore-based entities or personnel that may come on board the ship, if necessary, through the ship's port agent.

This list is not exhaustive but can serve as an aid in drawing up protocols.

Useful links on this topic:

[who.int/health-topics/coronavirus](https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus)

(WHO website for COVID-19 advice and guidance)

[ICS COVID-19: Guidance for Ensuring a Safe Shipboard Interface Between Ship and Shore-Based Personnel](#)

(A guidance for ship operators on protecting the health of seafarers and managing the interaction with shore-based personnel coming onboard the ship during the COVID-19 pandemic)

Posters that can be used on board to advise seafarers how to practice food safety, stay informed or how to take care when shopping can be downloaded at: [www.ics-shipping.org/covid19](http://www.ics-shipping.org/covid19).

Concerning face masks: Although face masks may provide some protection, the routine of face masks is not generally recommended as protection against COVID-19. However, it may be compulsory to wear face masks in a variety of places in some ports or cities, due to local regulations. See the [WHO Advice on the Use of Masks in the Context of COVID-19](#).

See **Annex I** for a list on details to be thought through.

### 3. Managing an outbreak of COVID-19 on board ship

Despite the development and implementation of measures to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 infection on board ships, there is a risk that shipboard personnel or passengers may become infected and begin to display symptoms of COVID-19 while on board ship.

The emergency preparedness plan shall be prepared based on the risk assessment and shall contain, inter alia:

- information on special hazards which may arise in case of a contamination incident;
- guidance for notification of incidents and measures to be taken to manage the situation;
- guidance for use of external assistance or rescue service.

#### ***Actions required if any person on board displays symptoms of COVID-19***

- Definition of a suspected case of COVID-19 (be aware that COVID-19 affects different people in different ways)
- Identification of close contacts and contact tracing
- Measures to limit exposure to other persons on board ship
- Isolation of suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19
- Caring for suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19
- Disembarkation of suspect and confirmed cases of COVID-19
- Cleaning and disinfection of the ship

When developing plans to manage outbreaks, ship operators should take into account the WHO Operational Considerations for Managing COVID-19 Cases/Outbreaks On Board Ships, interim guidance 25 March 2020, which should be used in conjunction with the WHO Handbook for Management of Public Health Events on Board Ships: [who.int/publications-detail/operational-considerations-for-managing-COVID-19-cases-outbreak-on-board-ships](https://www.who.int/publications-detail/operational-considerations-for-managing-COVID-19-cases-outbreak-on-board-ships)  
[who.int/ihr/publications/9789241549462/en/](https://www.who.int/ihr/publications/9789241549462/en/)

A useful assessment tool to see whether a seafarer might have COVID-19 can be found at [COVID19atsea.no](https://www.COVID19atsea.no)

## 4. Useful links

<http://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/HotTopics/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>

International Maritime Organization circulars, statements, and advice plus useful links.

<https://www.seafarerswelfare.org/news/2020/managing-your-mental-health-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>

The video provides guidance and information on managing the mental health of seafarers during the Covid 19 pandemic.

<https://wilhelmsen.com/ships-agency/campaigns/coronavirus/coronavirus-map>

Wilhelmsen Ships Service has developed an interactive map on current port restrictions

<http://www.covid19atsea.no>

Free interactive, internet based COVID-19 tool helping seafarers on board to assess sick crew members or others on board. Also gives guidance on treatment of possible cases of COVID-19 including warning signs to look out for and advice on when to contact TMAS services. Developed by NCMDM and Radio Medico Norway.

<https://www.igpandi.org/covid-19>

Free online COVID-19 tracker tool helping shipowners, charterers, operators and other parties in maritime to track country and port specific advice around the world, detailing the measures being put in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Source: Data from all 13 International Group Clubs, IMO, WHO and others.

<https://sustainableworldports.org/world-ports-covid19-information-portal/>

Guidance on current best practices, the industry's collective recommendations to governments as well as regularly updated useful information.

[who.int/health-topics/coronavirus](http://who.int/health-topics/coronavirus)

[www.ics-shipping.org/covid19](http://www.ics-shipping.org/covid19).

[who.int/publications-detail/global-surveillance-for-human-infection-with-novel-coronavirus-\(2019-ncov\)](http://who.int/publications-detail/global-surveillance-for-human-infection-with-novel-coronavirus-(2019-ncov))

## Annex I

### ***Food***

- Features relating to storage, handling and food packaging, transfer, preparation, cooking and serving of food is to be controlled and managed in order to minimize the risk of food contamination
- Cold/Provision rooms, galley, restaurants, pantries, locker protocols and provided handwashing stations.

### ***Water***

- Features relating to Bunker stations, potable water storage tanks, evaporators & reverse osmosis plants, cross-connection control and backflow prevention, drinking fountains, ice makers, water recreational facilities, pools and spas, decorative water features.

### ***Medical Centre***

- Features relating to onboarding checks, isolation space availability, medical center equipment (i.e. CLIA and ACEP guidelines, ventilators, established stock of PPE, etc.), air quality, sterilization of medical equipment, Medivac protocols.

### ***Air***

- Features relating to HVAC systems, Air quality; cleanliness and circulation details, minimizing recirculated air, maintenance.

### ***Hotel***

- Features relating to handwashing & sanitation ; signage/communication, crowd management tracking program, suitable number of facilities for handwashing / sanitation stations and waste receptacles are provided, Review dishwashing and Laundry reducing risk of infectious disease.

### ***Protection***

- Features relating to chemical usage and dosing.

### ***Human Element & Policy***

- An established Outbreak Prevention Management Plan with details on responses at various risk levels on all above categories, including embarkation of persons and materials.

An established trackable training program for all crew on infection awareness and prevention and a more advanced training for Medical and management Personnel .