

MARITIME INSIGHT

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Information note

COVID-19 general advice to Masters and crew

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus.

Most people infected with the virus will experience only mild or moderate symptoms of a respiratory illness and recover with no specific treatment. However, the disease can be more serious and patients may require hospital admission and advanced medical care.

At the time of writing over 1.1 million people have been infected worldwide and the maritime industry has already been affected with confirmed or suspected cases on both passenger vessels and merchant ships. The best way to prevent and slow down transmission is to be well informed about the COVID-19 virus, the disease it causes, and how it spreads (source: https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1. Accessed April 5th 2020).

Sources of information

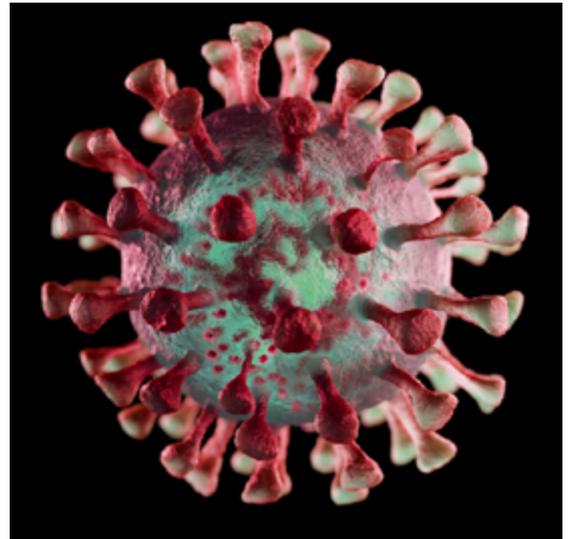
The Norwegian Centre for Maritime and Diving Medicine has developed an online, interactive tool to assist in the management of possible COVID-19 cases on board. This is freely available to all and can be found at www.covid19atsea.no

There are many sources of information about COVID-19 and we would suggest the following sites:

- World Health Organisation (WHO)
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
- International Maritime Organisation
<http://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/HotTopics/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>

These sites reference other sources of information from, for example, the International Chamber of Shipping, International Maritime Health Authority and the International Labour Organisation. The following summarises the main points from the information available at these and other websites.

In addition, Seagull Maritime and Videotel have launched a new programme called: "Coronavirus-



A 3D rendering of the nCov novel coronavirus responsible for COVID-19

How to Beat it." This is available free to the maritime industry. It outlines the common symptoms that seafarers need to be aware of and details the key precautions that individuals on board can take to minimise the spread of this highly contagious virus. You can see the video here: <https://vimeo.com/398986642>

Preventing the spread of COVID-19

There is currently no vaccine or known effective treatment against COVID-19. It is spread in the same way as a cold and flu illness and can be spread from the airways of an affected person in three ways:

- As droplets in the air from an infected cough or sneeze that then come into contact with the mucosa membranes in the eye, nose or mouth of other people close to the infected person.
- Through direct contact, for example, when the patient touches another person with virus on their hands.

- Through indirect contact when the virus is transferred by coughing/sneezing/touch of an infected person onto an object that is then touched by another person.

To prevent the spread of infection, avoid coughing or sneezing on others. Try to cough or sneeze into a paper towel that is thrown away immediately or, if this is not possible, cough or sneeze into a bent elbow. Avoid close contact (1–2 meters if possible) with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness and wash your hands regularly and thoroughly.

Proper hand washing by sick and healthy people is important to prevent transfer of the virus.

Wash your hands often and thoroughly with soap and hot water, especially after contact with others. Using appropriate hand sanitiser is a good alternative if hand washing is not possible. If your hands are dirty or wet, hand gels are less effective, and hand washing is preferred.

When to seek help on board

People on board who develop signs of respiratory disease, should contact the medical officer. Signs of respiratory infection include coughing, fever, sore throat, chest pain and difficulties breathing.

If required the medical officer can seek assistance from Telemedical Assistance Services (TMAS).

Management of suspected coronavirus illness on board

- The patient should be isolated in the sickbay, or in their own cabin. They should wear a medical facemask when in contact with other people.
- The patient's condition should be assessed regularly either in person or by telephone. If there is any deterioration in the patient's condition, TMAS services should be contacted.
- Contact with the patient should be limited to one or two other crew members. Anybody in contact with the patient should use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), such as facemask, apron or gown, gloves and goggles, when entering the

patient's cabin. Make sure to follow advice on hand washing and wash hands immediately after leaving the patient's cabin.

- Initiate routines for the disinfection of surfaces that many people may touch, for example, mess areas, door handles, railings, toilet flush buttons, telephones, navigation panels etc.
- Laundry, eating utensils and garbage from the cabin of an isolated person must be treated as contaminated by the virus. Use gloves when handling these items and cover them when in transit to the washing machine/dishwasher/ appropriate bin.

When going into port

- The Maritime Health Declaration must be completed and submitted according to usual procedures before entering a port.
- If illness due to COVID-19 is suspected on board, the port authorities must be informed and asked for instructions regarding the management of the patient. Guidance on how to manage contacts and other persons on board should also be requested.

Crew changes

- When planning a change of crew, careful consideration of local and international travel advice is essential. Travel advice from the WHO is available here: [Travel advice \(WHO\) – https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/travel-advice](https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/travel-advice)
- Any planned crew change should be considered on an individual basis and subject to a thorough risk assessment by the ship and ship owner.
- Port authorities should be contacted regarding local regulations.

NB: This paper has been prepared for *CHIRP Maritime* by Dr. Suzanne Stannard, Consultant, Norwegian Centre of Maritime and Diving Medicine and member of the *CHIRP Maritime Advisory Board*.

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