



RE: COVID-19: REVIEW OF NEWLY ISSUED ICS GUIDELINES FOR SHIP OPERATORS FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE HEALTH OF SEAFARERS.

In response to the current coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS), on 3 March 2020, published a guidance document known as “Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance for Ship Operators for the Protection of the Health of Seafarers” (**the Guidance**), for ship operators. The Guidance is given to advise all types of ships which operate in international waters, on the best practices to protect their seafarers and how to deal with suspect cases and confirmed cases of COVID-19 on board the ship.

The essence is to help shipping companies follow safety advice given by United Nations agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). This would also encourage co-operation amongst governments and between shipping companies engaged in maritime trade, in order to protect the health of seafarers (and passengers), as well as the general public.

There are several advices issued in thee Guidance including;

- Managing Port Entry Restrictions,
- Protective Measures Against COVID-19 for Seafarers,
- Outbreak Management Plan.
- Information and Awareness
- Pre-boarding Screening,
- Suspected Cases of Infection.

There is also practical advice on Hygiene Measures for Seafarers on Ships, Managing High Risk Exposure, Case Handling, Isolation and Cleaning, Disinfection and Waste Management. The Guidance also comes with posters which can be printed out and placed onboard ships as well as a Sample Pre-Boarding Passenger Locator Form and a WHO COVID-19 Support and Logistics Supplies List.

In the Guidance, explanation is given on how seafarers should generally protect themselves preventatively, especially with hygienic preventative measures such as regular hand washing and the right conduct when coughing and sneezing (i.e. with a tissue or in the crook of the arm). ICS published posters that can be put up by ship operators on board their ships for information purposes. It states also that the crew should be informed about how to deal with suspect and confirmed cases. A ship-specific outbreak management plan should be developed for concrete guidance of the crew.

Also, prior to any persons entering the ship, their health condition must be checked. The Guidance also provides specific and important advice for persons responsible for medical care on board the ship. Personal protection with suitable protective equipment, effective isolation and disinfection as well as competent care of the patients should all be equally ensured.

Additionally, the Guidance identifies three groups in relation to containing the pandemic: confirmed cases, suspect cases and people who have been in close contact to confirmed or

suspect cases. Any suspect case has to be reported by the master to the next port of call and the virus must be verified by a laboratory

Generally, the current procedure is that people who have been to a risk country/area should self-isolate for 14 days.

Despite the current and ongoing precautionary measures, there may be entry restrictions in ports, restrictions on crew changes and cargo operations or general delays. The Guidance also addresses this issue.

Thus, together with flag States, shipping companies and masters are required co-operate with port State authorities to ensure, where appropriate, that:

- (a). Seafarers can be changed;
- (b). Passengers can embark and disembark;
- (c). Shore leave can continue if safe to do so;
- (d). Cargo operations can occur;
- (e). Ships can enter and depart shipyards for repair and survey;
- (f). Stores and supplies can be loaded; and
- (g). Necessary certificates and documentation can be issued.

It is important to note that this does not in any way imply that ships shall be refused '*free pratique*' by the WHO International Health Regulation state parties for public health reasons, i.e. permission to enter a port, embark or disembark discharge or load cargo or stores¹. The Guidance is not aimed at restricting commercial operations or contractual obligations of ships, but is rather designed to support all types of ships which operate in international waters with the most up to date and effective information needed to limit the spread of the Coronavirus.

Nevertheless, many governments across the world have now introduced national and local restrictions including:

- (a). Delayed port clearance;
- (b). Prevention of crew or passengers from embarking or disembarking (preventing shore leave and crew changes);
- (c). Prevention of discharging or loading cargo or stores, or taking on fuel, water, food and supplies; and
- (d). Imposition of quarantine or refusal of port entry to ships (in extreme cases).

Understandably, these measures may severely affect maritime traffic, and may breach provisions of the IHR, the Convention on Facilitation of International Maritime Traffic (FAL Convention), and other maritime principles regarding the rights and treatment of seafarers and passengers; however, by virtue of the global current realities, shipping companies may have little choice but to adhere to such national and local restrictions of governments due to the potential risk of Covid-19 to the public.

However, it is expected that port States will continue to accept all ships (both cargo and passenger), for docking and to disembark suspected cases on board, as it is difficult to treat suspect cases on board without endangering others.

¹ The WHO IHR is available at www.who.int/ihr/publications/9789241580496/en/. Accessed 7th April 2020.

The published Guidance is being distributed to seafarers through the International Chamber of Shipping's network of national member associations, is free to download from the ICS website, and can be viewed [here](#).

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