

**Commonwealth of Dominica**



**Office of the Maritime Administrator**

**To: Owners/Operators, Masters, Nautical Inspectors, Recognized Organizations**

**Subject: CORONAVIRUS DISEASE UPDATES**

**Date: 29 September 2021**

**1.0 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)**

**1.1** The Commonwealth of Dominica (DMA) Maritime Administration (the “Administration”) is providing information and advice on protecting seafarers working on DMA-flagged vessels from transmission of SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) and management of Covid-19. This disease was determined as a pandemic by The World Health Organization (WHO). Countries across the world are facing diverse epidemiological situations with varying response capacities and access to life saving tools.

**1.2** Ship owners are advised to develop a written contingency plan, managing risks during ship operations and during an outbreak of Covid19 on board. Including shipboard measures and port measures as mentioned in this circular.

**1.3** Ship owners must facilitate measures to protect the health of seafarers and prevent infection. Including but not limited to the sufficient supply of medicines, medical supplies, disinfection chemicals and personal protection equipment (PPE).

**1.4** Any seafarer requiring medical attention, whatever the possible diagnosis, must be allowed to receive the necessary medical care without delay, including allowance to disembark the ship.

## 2.0 Training

### 2.1 Crew members should be educated on the following Covid-19 related information and topics:

- Hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, the need for wearing facemasks and social distancing.
- Signs and symptoms of Covid-19 that crew members should self-monitor.
- Covid-19 and any new evidence and guidance available, including variants of the disease and transmissibility.
- Measures to enhance physical and mental health.
- The ship's contingency plan for Covid-19, including procedures that are to be followed when a person displays signs and symptoms suggestive of Covid-19, rules about isolation of crew members who develop symptoms suggestive of Covid-19, the need to self-isolate immediately and inform the ships master if symptoms emerge.

## 3.0 Shipboard measures to protect health and prevent infection

### 3.1 The person(s) responsible for medical care on board ships should have access to real-time information about Covid-19 and any new evidence and guidance available, including variants of the disease and transmissibility. It is recommended that they regularly review the WHO website for Covid-19 advice and information in order to stay up to date with latest regional and global developments. WHO website: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance>

Shipboard measures associated with Covid-19 should cover the following:

### 3.2 Hygiene and ventilation

Standard Infection Protection and Control (IPC) precautions highlight the vital importance of hand and respiratory hygiene. In this respect:

- Seafarers should be given the time and opportunity to clean their hands after coughing, sneezing, using tissues, or after possible contact with respiratory secretions or objects or surfaces that might be contaminated.
- Masks should be used as part of a comprehensive strategy of measures to suppress transmission and save lives; the use of a mask alone is not sufficient to provide an adequate level of protection against COVID-19. WHO advises that it is appropriate to use a mask when coughing or sneezing, and if an individual is healthy, a face mask should be worn if physical distancing of at least one metre cannot be maintained and/or the ventilation in a room is poor. A medical mask should be worn if the person is taking care of a person with suspected COVID-19 infection. Medical masks should conform to ASTM F2100, EN14683 or equivalent standards.
- Cleaning and disinfection should be maintained as a high level, and especially in case of a Covid19 infection. Laundry, food service and waste from cabins of possible cases and close contacts should be treated as infectious in accordance with procedures.

### 3.3 Understanding and controlling building ventilation can improve the quality of the air we breathe and reduce the risk of indoor health concerns including prevent the virus that causes COVID-19 from spreading indoors. In a roadmap of WHO, seafarers and shipowners can find

key questions to assess indoor ventilation and major steps to reach recommended ventilation levels in order to reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19.

Find the roadmap here: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240021280>

### 3.4 Communication and monitoring

There should be clear and timely communication between the ship, the shipowner, its agents, competent authorities and the Administration. Communications channels must be enabled.

### 3.5 Personal protective equipment (PPE)

Plentiful supplies and equipment as described in the International Medical Guide for Ships, Third Edition, should be available on board to all crew members. WHO has published a list of suggested medical supplies for COVID-19:

[https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/disease-commodity-package---novel-coronavirus-\(ncov\)](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/disease-commodity-package---novel-coronavirus-(ncov))

The PPE that is made available to seafarers, should include a medical mask that covers the mouth and nose, goggles or a visor, a plastic apron or impermeable gown if this is available and disposable, nonsterile gloves.

### 3.6 Testing and assessment

In case of Covid-19 suspicion or when a crew member has clinical signs of pneumonia, fever, cough and/or labored breathing:

- Conduct a Covid-19 test at the earliest opportunity.
- Determine and take action on the need for medical care, radio medical advice in case of illness of a crew member and keep the patient stable until additional medical help is available.
- In case of the need for medical repatriation to an onshore health care facility, every effort should be made to minimize the exposure of other persons contamination and follow best practices by following WHO's guidance.
- Isolate the patient in a predefined isolation ward, cabin, room or quarters, and prevent spread of the virus by using all the necessary PPE and protective measures available.
- Persons providing health care, and persons entering the isolation area should be appropriately trained and should apply standard precautions as described in WHO's guidance for infection prevention and control.
- Persons who are isolated or quarantined should be checked upon regularly and need adequate food, water, hygiene provisions and means of communication.

### 3.8 Shipboard self-distancing

Ship operators should consider requiring seafarers to complete a period of ... days of shipboard self-distancing (SDD) after embarkation in order to monitor their health and to manage the risk that they may be infected but asymptomatic at the time of embarkation. This may not be necessary if a required period of quarantine in the country of embarkation has been completed.

Contact with a suspect case should be limited to a maximum of two other seafarers. Thoroughly

wash hands immediately before and after leaving the patient's cabin.

SSD may involve some of the following elements for seafarers:

- Maintaining a WHO recommended social distance of at least one meter when working alongside other seafarers to the extent possible;
- Regularly washing of hands and following good respiratory hygiene;
- Wearing a medical mask if appropriate when physical distancing cannot be maintained and minimizing close contact is difficult;
- Avoiding all non-essential contact or close proximity with other seafarers and any other persons;
- Using external stairways/escape routes and walkways to move around the ship when possible, but only if conditions and circumstances permit and it is safe to do so;
- Disinfecting their own work areas, equipment and tools as appropriate after use;
- Refraining from using any common areas on board, such as the mess/day room, laundry area or recreational areas when being used by others, unless special arrangements or measures are in place;
- Returning to their cabin immediately after completing work hours;
- Remaining in their cabin during rest hours, except when arrangements or measures are in place to permit them to spend some rest time on deck; and;
- Receiving and eating all meals in their cabin, provided it is safe to do so.

#### **4 Port measures to protect health and manage risks**

**4.1** Under the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), steps may be taken to ensure vessel and crew safety. Ship/shore interface between seafarers and shore personnel during port calls may create a risk of Covid-19 infection.

**4.2** Measures to minimize these risks could include but are not limited to:

- Request port authorities and port workers to comply with any screening or other protocols or procedures introduced by visiting ships to address COVID-19
- Refusing entry to anyone appearing ill; and
- Mandating washing or alcohol hand sanitizing regimes for stevedores, pilots, inspectors and others at the base of the gangway.
- Minimizing the number of non-crew members boarding the ship and ensure that shore personnel move only into authorized zones and designated walkways.

**4.3** Communication protocols should be established for about and contact details from all persons who are boarding the ship in order to communicate with them if needed during the 14 days after they disembark. Vice versa, port authorities should advise the ship if any shore personnel develop any signs or symptoms within 14 days of having boarded the ship.

**4.4** The master of the ship must immediately inform the port health authority at the next port of call about any suspected case of Covid-19 and complete the Maritime Declaration of Health in accordance with local requirements at the port of call.

- 4.3 During a possible Covid-19 case, all seafarers on board should be tested for Covid-19 and monitored closely. Further action or steps should be consulted with local port health authorities.  
If all of the tests are negative, seafarers should eventually be released from isolation and be granted shore leave, air and ground travel or return to work on board.

#### **4.0 Crew Contracts**

- 4.1 The Administrator is aware that stringent border control measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 have resulted in operators having difficulty in arranging crew changes and repatriating seafarers when their employment agreements expire. As a result, some seafarers employed to work on DMA-flagged ships may exceed the service period as entered in their seafarer employment agreements (SEA).
- 4.2 The Administration allows for extended SEAs only in situations where there is no other alternative. It also recognizes in contrast to this position that some port States hold a rigid interpretation that an SEA may not be extended beyond 11 months or its original contract date, if less than that period.
- 4.3 The Administration is handling these COVID-19 contract and repatriation issues on a case-by-case basis. It encourages dialog between the relevant stakeholders (flag State, shipowner, seafarer, and port State) so that a practicable way forward to an already difficult situation may be taken. While it is important that the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (MLC, 2006) is complied with and enforced, ships and crew should not be unreasonably detained or delayed per MLC, 2006, Standard 5.2.1.8, because of the lack of flexibility in this unforeseen circumstance.
- 4.4 Shipowners, managers, and crewing agencies are instructed to think ahead and prepare for seafarer and crew relief in light of the current circumstances.

#### **5.1 Certificate of Competency/Proficiency and Medical Certification Expiry Extensions**

- 5.2 The International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW) Medical Certificates are valid for three months from the expiration date in accordance with STCW Regulation I/9. The validity of STCW Medical Certificates, which are due to expire, are granted an extended validity for three months from the expiration date.
- 5.2 The Administration will honor all extensions of national CoCs and CoPs issued by International Maritime Organization (IMO) White Listed parties by extending DMA Certificates of Endorsement accordingly. Please note that the Administrator cannot extend an endorsement unless the issuing Administration has allowed extension of the underlying CoC.
- 5.3 Mariners who are actively working on expired credentials that meet the expiration criteria

must carry the expired credential with a copy of this advisory.

- 5.4 The extended validity has been granted to provide sufficient time for seafarers to apply for recertification, complete required refresher training and to avoid interrupting the critical flow of goods and services during this unprecedented emergency.
- 5.5 The Administration will not issue temporary authorization letters, extensions of Certificate of Receipts of Application (CRA), Urgent Authorizations (UA), Acknowledgements, or dispensations during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 5.6 As an alternative solution for extended validity of certificates, The Administration recommends and advises seafarers, shipowners, shipmanagers, and crewing agencies to consider the online, STCW compliant training solutions that Northeast Maritime Online provides at [www.northeastmaritimeonline.com](http://www.northeastmaritimeonline.com).

## 7.0 Additional Information and Resources

More information, including situational reports and technical guidance, can be found at <https://www.dominica-registry.com>

### **Resources:**

*WHO - Technical guidance dashboard:*

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance>

*WHO Roadmap to improve and ensure good indoor ventilation in the context of Covid-19*

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240021280>

*Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Joint IMO/ILO statement on upholding medical assistance obligations to seafarers and accelerating seafarer vaccination programmes:*

[https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/MediaCentre/HotTopics/Documents/COVID%20CL%204204%20add/Circular%20Letter%20No.4204-Add.42%20-%20Coronavirus%20\(Covid-19\)%20-%20Joint%20ImoIlo%20Statement%20On%20UpholdingMedical%20Assistance%20Obligations.pdf](https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/MediaCentre/HotTopics/Documents/COVID%20CL%204204%20add/Circular%20Letter%20No.4204-Add.42%20-%20Coronavirus%20(Covid-19)%20-%20Joint%20ImoIlo%20Statement%20On%20UpholdingMedical%20Assistance%20Obligations.pdf)

*ICS guidance, including posters, sample cards and forms, support lists, measures and procedures.*

[https://www.ics-shipping.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Guidance-for-Ship-Operators-for-the-Protection-of-the-Health-of-Seafarers\\_Fourth-Edition\\_Final.pdf](https://www.ics-shipping.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Guidance-for-Ship-Operators-for-the-Protection-of-the-Health-of-Seafarers_Fourth-Edition_Final.pdf)

*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>

*ICS Guidance for ensuring a safe shipboard interface between ship and shore based personnel*

<https://www.ics-shipping.org/publication/coronavirus-covid-19-guidelines-for-ensuring-a-safe-shipboard-interface-between-ship-and-shore-based-personnel/>

