

Draft IMO Circular Letter

To: All IMO Member States
United Nations and specialized agencies
Intergovernmental organizations
Non-governmental organizations in consultative status with IMO

Subject: **Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Recommendations for port and coastal states on the prompt disembarkation of seafarers for medical care ashore during the COVID-19 pandemic**

The Secretary-General is aware that, amongst the many challenges facing international shipping during the COVID-19 pandemic, has been the challenge of arranging for seafarers to access medical care ashore.¹ Addressing this challenge requires the relevant authorities in port and coastal States to meet their obligations under relevant international regulations and work with ships to protect the health of seafarers and the general public and ensure that global supply chains continue to function as required during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Secretary-General refers to relevant guidance already issued by the Organization:

- Circular Letter No.4204/Add.6 of 27 March 2020, *Preliminary list of recommendations for Governments and relevant national authorities on the facilitation of maritime trade during the COVID-19 pandemic*;
- Circular Letter No.4204/Add.15 of 6 May 2020, *Personal protective equipment*;
- Circular Letter No.4204/Add.21 of 8 June 2020, *Joint statement IMO-UNCTAD – Call for collaborative action in support of keeping ships moving, ports open and cross-border trade flowing during the COVID-19 pandemic*; and
- Circular Letter No.4204/Add.16 of 6 May 2020, *COVID-19 related guidelines for ensuring a safe shipboard interface between ship and shore-based personnel*

Building on the above relevant guidance, the Secretary-General has received *Recommendations for port and coastal states on the prompt disembarkation of seafarers for medical care ashore during the COVID-19 pandemic*, developed by a broad coalition of non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the IMO, as follows: ICS, IAPH, BIMCO, IFSMA, INTERTANKO, P&I Clubs, INTERCARGO, InterManager, IPTA, IMCA, INTERFERRY, FONASBA, ITF, CLIA and WSC.

The Secretary-General supports these recommendations and urges their dissemination and implementation by Members. Member States, in their capacities as port and coastal States, are invited to be guided accordingly and bring the recommendations to the attention of all concerned, in particular, border and port health authorities.²

¹ He has also noted that in the commercial fishing sector, fishing vessel personnel have faced similar.

² These recommendations will also to the commercial fishing sector, as fishing vessel personnel on commercial fishing vessels have faced similar challenges accessing medical care ashore.

ANNEX

RECOMMENDATIONS TO PORT AND COASTAL STATES ON THE PROMPT DISEMBARKATION OF SEAFARERS FOR MEDICAL CARE ASHORE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Introduction

1 Ships have faced difficulties arranging for the disembarkation of seafarers to receive medical care ashore during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly when it has involved a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19, and some have experienced delays or disruptions to their operations in these situations.

2 Prompt and efficient disembarkation of seafarers to receive medical care ashore during the COVID-19 pandemic is essential for the protection of seafarer and public health and vital for the maintenance of global supply chains. Therefore, it must be effectively managed through prompt and predictable arrangements by port and coastal States and good communication and cooperation between ships and the relevant authorities ashore.

3 Industry guidance has already been developed to provide recommendations to ship operators on the medical care onboard ships during the COVID-19 pandemic and the management of outbreaks, including the disembarkation of suspected or confirmed cases.³ Experience has indicated the need for similar recommendations for the relevant authorities of port and coastal States addressing the disembarkation of seafarers to receive prompt medical care ashore, for whatever reason, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Purpose

4 The purpose of this guidance is to provide recommendations to the relevant authorities in port and coastal States on the prompt disembarkation of seafarers from ships to receive medical care ashore during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly when it involves a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19.⁴

5 During the COVID-19 pandemic, the world is relying on the continuing functioning of global supply chains, which are supported by maritime transportation and the effective operation of ships and ports. Therefore, recommendations promoting consistency and efficiency by port and coastal States to disembark seafarers to receive medical care ashore during the COVID-19 pandemic should help ensure the safety and well-being of seafarers and functioning of global supply chains.

Scope

6 The recommendations in this guidance are addressed to port and coastal States with obligations under relevant international regulations, *inter alia*, concerning ensuring access to medical facilities ashore for seafarers and facilitation of international maritime trade.

³ [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Guidance for Ship Operators for the Protection of the Health of Seafarers](#) (Version 2.1) International Chamber of Shipping (ICS), 29 May 2020.

⁴ The recommendations are applicable to workers in the offshore energy sector who face challenges similar to those of seafarers with regards to securing access to medical care ashore during the COVID-19 pandemic, and take account of IMO Circular Letter No.4204/Add.13 on *Recommendations for Governments and relevant national authorities on facilitating the movement of offshore energy sector personnel during the COVID-19 pandemic*.

Recommendations related to seafarers

7 When a ship reports a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 onboard, the relevant authorities in the port or coastal State are recommended to:

- .1 Advise ships to isolate the suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 in a cabin designated for isolation prior to their disembarkation;
- .2 Advise ships to ensure the suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 is wearing appropriate PPE, follows cough etiquette and practices hand hygiene, and other relevant infection prevention and control measures, prior to and during disembarkation and transfer to a medical facility ashore;
- .3 Advise ships to ensure that all seafarers onboard are monitored for signs or symptoms of COVID-19, including regular temperature checks, prior to disembarkation of the suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 and while they are receiving medical attention ashore;
- .4 Advise ships to ensure that seafarers wear appropriate PPE when shore-based personnel are onboard the ship and adhere to applicable infection prevention and control measures;
- .5 Arrange for the prompt disembarkation and transfer of the suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 from the ship to a medical facility ashore for further assessment, testing isolation or medical care, as appropriate;⁵
- .6 Arrange to minimize the exposure of the suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 to infrastructures and personnel in the port, or its immediate vicinity, during disembarkation and transfer to a medical facility ashore by implementing applicable infection prevention and control measures; and
- .7 Obtain information from the ship about the close contacts of the suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 to assess risks to other seafarers onboard ship or the shore-based personnel that have interacted with the ship, arranging for testing where available.

8 When a ship reports a seafarer that requires medical care ashore and is not suspected of having COVID-19, the relevant authorities in the port or coastal State are recommended to:

- .1 Advise ships to ensure that seafarers wear appropriate PPE when external shore-based personnel are onboard the ship and adhere to applicable infection prevent and control measures;
- .2 Advise ships to ensure seafarers wear appropriate PPE and adhere to relevant infection prevention and control measures, during disembarkation of the seafarer;
- .3 Arrange for the prompt disembarkation and transfer of the seafarer from the ship to a medical facility ashore for further assessment and medical care;⁶ and

⁵ Regulation 4.1 of the ILO Maritime Labour Convention (MLC), 2006, as amended, requires that seafarers on board ships who are in need of immediate medical care are given access to medical facilities on shore. Similarly, Article 29(e) of the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188) provides that fishers have the right to medical treatment ashore and the right to be taken ashore in a timely manner for treatment in the event of serious injury or illness.

⁶ *ibid*

- .4 Arrange to minimize the exposure of the seafarer to infrastructures and personnel in the port, or its immediate vicinity, during disembarkation and transfer to a medical facility ashore by implementing applicable infection prevention and control measures.

Recommendations related to the ship

9 When a ship reports a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 onboard, the relevant authorities in the port or coastal State are recommended to:

- .1 Grant ships permission to enter ports and proceed to a berth in accordance with the relevant procedures of the port or terminal, regardless of whether or not they were due to call at a port or terminal in the territory or engage in cargo or other operations;
- .2 Grant ships permission to disembark the suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 for transfer to a medical facility ashore without delay;
- .3 Provide information to the ship on arrangements related to health protection and infection prevention and control whilst the ship is at the port or terminal, including information on the specific arrangements for disembarkation and transfer of the suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 to a medical facility ashore; and
- .4 Advise ships of requirements related to cleaning and disinfection of certain areas onboard the ship, including cabins and facilities used by a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 and close contacts; and
- .5 Require any shore-based personnel that may interact with, or go onboard, the ship during the course of the disembarkation of the suspect of confirmed case of COVID-19 to wear appropriate PPE and adhere to applicable infection prevention and control measures.⁷

10 When a ship reports a seafarer that requires medical care ashore and is not suspected of having COVID-19, the relevant authorities in the port or coastal State are recommended to:

- .1 Grant ships permission to enter ports and proceed to a berth in accordance with the relevant procedures of the port or terminal, regardless of whether or not they were due to call at a port in the territory or engage in cargo or other operations;
- .2 Provide information to the ship on arrangements related to health protection and infection prevention and control whilst the ship is at the port or terminal, including information on the specific arrangements for disembarkation and transfer of a seafarer to a medical facility ashore;
- .3 Grant ships permission to disembark the seafarer that requires medical attention and transfer them to a medical facility ashore without delay; and
- .4 Require any shore-based personnel that may interact with, or go onboard, the ship during the course of the disembarkation of the seafarer to wear appropriate PPE and adhere to applicable infection prevention and control measures.

⁷ See WHO guidance on "Handling cargo from affected countries" in [Rational use of personal protective equipment for coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) and considerations during severe shortages](#) (Interim guidance) World Health Organization, 6 April 2020.

Recommendations related to the ship operations

11 When a ship reports a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 onboard, the relevant authorities in the port or coastal State are recommended to:

- .1 Permit ship operations to commence and proceed as planned and in accordance with the relevant procedures of the port or terminal;⁸
- .2 Require any shore-based personnel that may interact with, or go onboard, the ship for the purposes of the operations (e.g. stevedores etc.) to wear appropriate PPE and adhere to applicable infection prevention and control measures;⁹ and
- .3 Allow any seafarer who is receiving medical care ashore as a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 to remain, as necessary, to continue to receive care at the medical or other facility and recover before being duly repatriated by the shipowner, and permit the ship to depart and proceed on its voyage (subject to, if applicable, the ship being given any necessary dispensation by its flag State).

12 When a ship reports a seafarer that requires medical care ashore and is not suspected of having COVID-19, the relevant authorities in the port or coastal State are recommended to:

- .1 Permit ship operations to commence and proceed as planned and in accordance with the relevant procedures of the port or terminal;
- .2 Require any shore-based personnel that may interact with, or go onboard, the ship for the purposes of the operations (e.g. stevedores etc.) to wear appropriate PPE and adhere to applicable infection prevention and control measures; and
- .3 Allow any seafarer who is receiving medical care ashore to remain, as necessary, to continue to receive care or recover at the medical or other facility before being duly repatriated by the shipowner, and permit the ship to depart and proceed on its voyage (subject to, if applicable, the ship being given a dispensation by its flag State).

⁸ Article 28, paragraph 2, of the WHO International Health Regulations (2015), states that ships or aircraft shall not be refused *free pratique* by States Parties for public health reasons; in particular they shall not be prevented from embarking or disembarking, discharging or loading cargo or stores, or taking on fuel, water, food and supplies.

⁹ See WHO guidance on "Handling cargo from affected countries" in [Rational use of personal protective equipment for coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) and considerations during severe shortages](#) (Interim guidance) World Health Organization, 6 April 2020.