

Procedural Aspects of CoViD-19 Vaccinations for International Seafarers in Belgian Ports

Introduction

The increasing availability of safe and authorized CoViD-19 vaccines for the first time provides the opportunity to vaccinate seafarers on board their ships while in port.

Speedy vaccination of seafarers secures their health and serves to avoid the international propagation of CoViD-19 virus variants via maritime traffic.

Detailed guidance on CoViD-19 vaccination in shipping and accompanying legal issues was published by the **International Chamber of Shipping (ICS)**: www.ics-shipping.org
Coronavirus (COVID-19) Roadmap for Vaccination of International Seafarers (1)
Coronavirus (COVID-19) Legal, Liability and Insurance Issues Arising from Vaccination of Seafarers (2)

In addition to the information provided by the manufacturers on the application of vaccines and the recommendations of the Belgian Government Corona Commission, these ICS guidelines provide a basis for all parties for the joint execution of vaccinations on board, in particular about issues of liability, data protection, safety and the voluntary nature of vaccination.

The responsible port health services, must be informed about the start of vaccination activities in the port area.

Who is vaccinated?

In Belgian ports J&J vaccine will be offered to international visiting seafarers. This vaccine requires only one dose.

Only seafarers who have NOT received a vaccine approved by the EMA in the EU yet, will be vaccinated. A seafarer vaccinated with another vaccine (non-EU listed) may request a vaccination.

Second doses of EU listed vaccines are not available for seafarers in Belgian ports.

The vaccination is voluntary, individual seafarers give their consent to be vaccinated.

The J&J vaccine is available for 18yr plus in the EU and in Belgium 40 year olds and less have to give their permission to get the vaccine. Therefore the documentation contains a brochure from the Belgian Authorities explaining the issue. Seafarers younger than 40 yrs will give their consent prior to vaccination.

Organisation

The vaccines will be kept, prepared and distributed from two medical centres:

Port of Antwerp and Port of Ghent:

Mediport

Italiëlei 51

2000 Antwerpen

mediport@online.be

+32 474 25 05 09

Port of Zeebrugge:

Dr Thomas Vandamme

Noordzeestraat 14

8380 Zeebrugge

thomas.vandamme@attentia.be

+32 50 54 46 46

In these centres, vaccines may be administered to on-signers and off-signers, and seafarers attending for testing, fitness examinations or medical treatments.

From these centres teams will collect syringes with prepared vaccines and go to ships to vaccinate seafarers on board.

The teams will consist of doctors and/or nurses, their number depending on the number of vaccines ordered.

They will have their own transport to the ship, they are equipped with all personal protection material terminals may require and will be announced prior to arrival via the appropriate system, where necessary assisted by the agent.

Planning of the vaccinations

48 hours before berthing, the agent informs the responsible medical centre by email about a request for vaccination by the master of a vessel:

- The number of vaccines requested, keeping in mind that only non-vaccinated crew can be vaccinated, those who have received a first dose of another vaccine elsewhere cannot be vaccinated with J&J.
- The estimated time of berthing and the expected total time in port.
- Where possible masters can also send crew to the medical centre for vaccination, this especially if the number is small, like 4 persons or less.

In respect of the first call, first served principle the dispatch at the medical centre also takes into account:

- Date and time of the request by email
- The number of vaccines requested (the more, the higher the priority)
- The return of the vessel to a Belgian port (regular ships may have to wait for ships coming only occasionally)
- The total time in port (the longer the vessel stays, the less urgent vaccination is)
- The accessibility of the terminal (the less time a team spends on a vaccination job, the more chance to get it done)

The vaccination is offered but cannot be claimed, the capacity of the medical centres and teams is expanded but has limitations. Availability of teams and vaccines may fluctuate, the medical centres therefore may not be able to fulfil every request made, certainly not in the beginning of the campaign.

In the beginning the teams will work early and late, but no night work and not during weekends.

Vaccines

Janssen® vaccine by Johnson & Johnson can be applied for seafarers as it is especially suited; it needs to be applied only once, it is easier to prepare and can be kept protected against light in a cool box for 3 to 6 hours.

In the EU, the vaccine is authorised for persons aged 18 and over; based on the current data, the Belgian Government Corona Commission recommends that Johnson & Johnson's vaccine Janssen® should normally be used for persons aged 41 and over. The use of this vaccine as a one-time vaccination below this age limit is permitted based on medical information and individual risk acceptance by the vaccinee and makes sense in view of the above-mentioned advantage for seafarers in active employment.

The teams

The medical centres work with teams of doctors and nurses who go on board. These teams are instructed on safety issues of the terminals and on board ship.

Specific instructions and SOP's of entrance, transport and exit procedures on terminals are communicated to the medical centres and teams beforehand by the operators and/or shipping agents.

The teams have personal protection material as required by the port, made available to them at the medical centres.

The teams have mobile phones and emergency numbers and first aid equipment and instructions.

Also protective clothing and material to clean and disinfect surfaces and to organize the vaccination on board.

Cool boxes and medical bags to transport the vaccines, medical instruments and sharps containers.

Access to terminals

The agency assists the medical centres to get access to the terminals easily, with priority, avoiding waiting time and repeated instruction, because of the limited time for the vaccine transport.

Teams have all equipment and personal protection material (helmet, goggles, vest,...) they may need for safety.

Their arrival to the terminal is announced by the agents upon request of the medical centres.

Vaccination

Beforehand the crew has been provided with information sheets in advance. As well as the information on the J&J vaccine by the Belgian authorities.

The International Chamber of Shipping has written a general statement on COVID-19 for shipping to be made available to seafarers in advance: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Vaccination for Seafarers and Shipping Companies: A Practical Guide Your Questions Answered (5) www.ics-shipping.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Coronavirus-COVID-19-Vaccination-for-Seafarers-and-Shipping-Companies-A-Practical-Guide.pdf

The master makes a room available for the teams with enough space to organize the vaccination in a clean way and respect the rules of distancing and protection during the procedure (preferably mess room or bridge, also depending on the ventilation available).

A crew list is available and the persons who will be vaccinated are marked on that list, meaning that the master has verified if the person has already been vaccinated for Covid-19 before and if the person volunteers for Johnson and Johnson vaccine.

The vaccinations are checked for temperature and time stamp, it is verified if they are kept cool and protected from light and vibration during transport before administration to the candidates.

The crew is lined up in an orderly way, with respect for social distancing, and assisted by the master / officer responsible for medical care on board.

The vaccinator takes a short medical history of the seafarers and questions them on allergies and adverse reactions on vaccines in the past to identify possible contraindications.

The vaccination is administered by the vaccinator.

The master organises ample seating with respect of social distancing for all vaccinated to be seated, so that the medical team can observe the patients for 15 minutes after injection for acute complications.

In case of problems with the organisation of a timely vaccination, the teams may set a time limit within which they leave the ship, to go vaccinate on a next vessel in time, with respect to the cold chain of other vaccines transported. Never should a team be more than one hour on board.

Certification

The certification of the vaccination is issued in the international vaccination card (the yellow booklet), date, disease, vaccine, lot number, signature and stamp of the doctor.

The team carries a number of spare vaccination cards to issue them to those who do not have one.

If a team has no doctor, the cards are collected, brought to the medical centre, signed and stamped, and returned to the vessel via the agent.

The vaccination team takes a list of all vaccinated crew with them to keep record of the vaccinations in the medical centre.

The vaccinations are recorded at the medical centres but are NOT registered in the national Belgian vaccination database: Vaccinet.

Cost

The cost of vaccination is free of charge for the seafarer. The vaccine is offered by the authorities. There is an administrative and handling cost that covers:

- Storage of the vaccines
- Preparing and labelling of the individual doses
- Cold chain during transport
- The injection
- The certification
- Observation and assistance to the patients
- Equipment, personal protection and emergency preparedness of the teams
- Planning and booking of the vaccinations
- Administration
- Working time of the doctors and nurses
- Travel expenses back and forth to the ship
- Overhead costs

Data protection

The seagoing population must be assured that vaccination remains a voluntary action and the employer does not have any access to the medical data of crew members. The medical history and consent sheets remain with the vaccinators (the retention period is 10 years). The general data protection rules apply to the collection and processing of health data under the GDPR.

Equipment

To be made available on board by the shipping company / master.

- Suitable vaccination area, e.g. office or mess-room with a large clean desk, bridge.
- Nearby waiting and observation area
- Seating accommodation for all vaccinated for 15- 30 min, at least one berth
- FFP2-/surgical masks for vaccinees
- Water available

To be brought by the vaccinating physicians:

- Vaccines and paraphernalia
- Personal protective equipment
- Batch sticker, vaccination stamp, health certificate (in lieu of Vacc. Certif.)
- The medication for the treatment of anaphylactic emergencies is brought on board in their emergency set by the vaccinating physicians.

Clearance for passing through restricted port areas and access to the ship must be provided by the ship-owner, ship agent or master in advance.

Protective equipment for vaccinators

- Depending on the terminal traffic situation: warning light for the car
- Safety shoes, at least closed footwear with non-slip sole
- Protective helmet, size adjustable
- Safety jacket (reflective)
- Protective gloves
- Rescue vest as appropriate
- Mobile phone / hands-free system in the car
- Sufficient transportation bags for vaccines and emergency equipment (preferred rucksack to keep hands free)
- Single-use gloves, FFP 2 mask

Time assessment

- Travelling from office to terminal: 30-60 min

- Individual voyage from terminal entrance to ship: as short as possible, 15-30 min
- Establishment of the vaccination area, getting to know the location, assessment of emergency equipment: 30 min
- vaccination: 30-60 min
- follow-up: 15 - 30 min/person

Bibliography

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