

World Health Organisation guidance for shipboard personnel

The global coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, is creating unprecedented and unexpected circumstances, it is a dire test not only for the global economy, but also for the health of millions of people and the way we conduct our everyday lives.

Seafarers, have been praised and recognized for their dedication and sacrifice in providing supplies to the global community, and delivering the essential goods we all depend on. The response from the global community towards the crisis has highlighted a number of key questions on how to ensure key workers, like seafarers, can be protected from the virus.

Guidelines have been produced by the World Health Organisation (WHO), and countries have adapted them to fit their national circumstances so that policies can be created for protection in the work place for the specific needs of workers. Evidence suggest that there are two main routes of transmission for the virus Covid-19, via respiratory droplets and contact. Also, transmission may also occur via fomites in the immediate environment of the infected person. Under certain circumstances and settings, airborne transmission may be possible. However, the medical community has recommended a cautious approach because of the still limited knowledge about the virus, and therefore reference is made to the authority of the World Health Organisation guidelines for prevention and protection.

We thought it was important to address the direct concerns that seafarers have shared with us regarding life on board ships. Companies have developed preventive and protective policies that should be adhered to, however an understanding of best practices on hygiene and prevention, will increase their effectiveness.

The questions, and recommended WHO guidance, are as follows:

Question 1 – wearing of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) by visitors to a ship

Should we be concerned that visitors to a ship are not wearing masks/gloves and other PPE', or are removing them once they are inside the ship?

There is not conclusive evidence that masks do prevent the contagion, however, they are recommended by many national guidelines for use in enclosed spaces. Reference should be made to the company policy and request it be extended to external visitors in all its aspects.

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks>

Question 2 – Protection when leaving the ship and travelling home

What is the appropriate protection to wear when leaving the ship and travelling home (waiting at an airport or hotel, boarding and travelling by plane)?

Depending on the national policies where the disembarkation may take place, seafarers may be required to be provided by their company a sufficient amount of PPE for protection when leaving the ship and up until the arrival airport and/or home.

Question 3 – Possible transmission of the virus from the ship's galley

Can the virus be transmitted through food preparation in the ships galley or by the ships cook?

There is currently no confirmed case of COVID-19 transmitted through food or food packaging. For fruits and vegetables, before handling them, wash your hands with soap and water. Then, wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly with clean water, especially if you eat them raw. Five keys for safer food during COVID-19 can be found here:

https://www.who.int/images/default-source/infographics/food-safety/five-key-to-safer-food.png?sfvrsn=acf2b8eb_2

Question 4 - Sleeping arrangements and protection on board ship with shared cabins

What are the appropriate safeguards in shared cabins?

The physical distance principle applies: at least one meter needs to be considered when making arrangements in shared cabins, with enhanced cleaning and disinfection procedures.

Question 5 – The use of shared toilet facilities

What safeguards are required for the use and sanitation of shared toilet facilities?

Clean and disinfect bathroom and toilet surfaces at least once daily. Regular household soap or detergent should be used first for cleaning, and then, after rinsing, regular household disinfectant containing 0.1% sodium hypochlorite should be applied.

[https://www.who.int/publications-detail/home-care-for-patients-with-suspected-novel-coronavirus-\(ncov\)-infection-presenting-with-mild-symptoms-and-management-of-contacts](https://www.who.int/publications-detail/home-care-for-patients-with-suspected-novel-coronavirus-(ncov)-infection-presenting-with-mild-symptoms-and-management-of-contacts)

Question 6 - How to ensure the appropriate sanitation of clothes and working gear on the ship's shared laundry facilities?

Please see the following links:

[https://www.who.int/images/default-source/health-topics/coronavirus/eng-mythbusting-ncov-\(30\).tmb-1920v.png](https://www.who.int/images/default-source/health-topics/coronavirus/eng-mythbusting-ncov-(30).tmb-1920v.png)

[https://www.who.int/images/default-source/health-topics/coronavirus/eng-mythbusting-ncov-\(33\).tmb-1920v.png](https://www.who.int/images/default-source/health-topics/coronavirus/eng-mythbusting-ncov-(33).tmb-1920v.png)

Question 7: Recommendations on PPE for emergency work

What are the recommendations on using masks, gloves and other PPE for emergency work on board when social distance is not possible, e.g. essential deck or engine work that requires multiple crew to lift and/or repair ships' machinery)?

Maintain at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself and others. Why? When someone coughs, sneezes, or speaks they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain the virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the droplets, including the COVID-19 virus if the person has the disease. As a precautionary measure it is recommended that at least a face mask and gloves are used to limit the possible exposure.