



**A Joint Statement on medical certificates of seafarers, ship sanitation certificates and medical care of seafarers in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic
22 April 2020**

On 30 January 2020 the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the current COVID-19 outbreak as a public health emergency of international concern under the International Health Regulations (2005) and issued Temporary Recommendations.

On 11 March 2020, the Director-General of the WHO characterized the situation of the COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic.

The WHO, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), in cooperation with international seafarers' and shipowners' organizations, are working together to ensure the ability of shipping and seafarers to continue to deliver vital goods, including medical supplies and food. Our three Organizations seek to ensure that seafarers are protected from the COVID-19 virus, are medically fit and have access to medical care, and that their ships meet international sanitary requirements, bearing in mind the challenges presented by this situation.

More than two thirds of the countries globally are implementing restrictions on international traffic, including flight suspensions and port closures. This has a significant impact on global trade, 90% of which is transported via ships. WHO has advised countries that restrictions on international traffic should be based on evidence and be proportionate with the level of risk for each country. It is working closely with global experts, governments and partners to rapidly expand scientific knowledge about this new virus, to track the spread and virulence of the virus, and to provide advice to countries and the global community on measures to protect health and contain the spread of this outbreak without unnecessary interference with international traffic.

In this context, we strongly encourage Governments to facilitate ships' movements, including docking, crew changes, ship inspection and issuance of ship sanitation certificates during the COVID-19 pandemic. We further call upon Governments to ensure that information regarding suspension of port services and other measures introduced in response to COVID-19 is quickly and effectively communicated to international shipping and all relevant stakeholders.

IMO has issued a series of Circular Letters addressing global issues relevant to seafarers and shipping in the context of COVID-19:

- Circular Letter No.4204 of 31 January 2020, providing information and guidance on the precautions to be taken to minimize risks to seafarers, passengers and others on board ships from the novel coronavirus (COVID-19);
- Circular Letter No.4204/Add.1 of 19 February 2020, COVID-19 – Implementation and enforcement of relevant IMO instruments;
- Circular Letter No.4204/Add.2 of 21 February 2020, Joint Statement IMO-WHO on the Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak;
- Circular Letter No.4204/Add.3 of 2 March 2020, Operational considerations for managing COVID-19 cases/outbreak on board ships prepared by WHO;
- Circular Letter No.4204/Add.4 of 5 March 2020, ICS Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance for ship operators for the protection of the health of seafarers;

- Circular Letter No.4204/Add.5/Rev.1 of 2 April 2020, Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Guidance relating to the certification of seafarers and fishing vessel personnel;
- Circular Letter No.4204/Add.6 of 30 March 2020, Coronavirus (COVID-19) - Preliminary list of recommendations for Governments and relevant national authorities on the facilitation of maritime trade during the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- Circular Letter No.4204/Add.7 of 3 April 2020, Coronavirus (COVID-19) - Guidance concerning unforeseen delays in the delivery of ships.

ILO is addressing all aspects of the impact of COVID-19 on the world of work, through the protection of people, jobs, incomes and enterprises, and relying on social dialogue for solutions.

Medical care of seafarers

The Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended (MLC, 2006) provides that every seafarer has the right to a safe and secure workplace that complies with safety standards and to health protection, medical care, welfare measures and other forms of social protection. All seafarers must be covered by adequate measures for the protection of their health and must have access to prompt and adequate medical care whilst working on board. Port States must ensure that seafarers on board ships in their territory who are in need of immediate medical care are given access to medical facilities on shore.

Following the outbreak, questions have arisen concerning the application of the provisions of the MLC, 2006, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. These have included questions related to medical care of seafarers. ILO, following consultations with Governments, shipowners and seafarers represented by the Officers of the Special Tripartite Committee of the MLC, 2006, is providing information to assist Governments and other relevant actors to take consistent actions under these exceptional circumstances.

Other unforeseen health related issues have also arisen. These include the need to address the situation of seafarers who, due to their unforeseen longer periods on board, are facing expiration of essential medical prescriptions, and the consideration of the testing of seafarers immediately prior to their joining their ships, when testing for COVID-19 becomes more widely available,

Medical certificates of seafarers

Medical certificates of seafarers are required in regulation 1/9 of the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW Convention), 1978, and in regulation 1.2 of the MLC, 2006. According to both international treaties, medical certificates are valid for a maximum of two years. If a medical certificate expires during the course of a voyage, then it shall continue to be valid until the next port of call where a medical practitioner recognized by a Party is available, provided that the additional time needed does not exceed three months.

While in the current situation renewals of medical certificates may not be possible, exemption from national restriction of movements physicians responsible for medical examination of seafarers should be considered. Competent authorities are requested to regularly review the evolution of existing restrictions and to renew the certificates as soon as the situation improves. Port State control authorities are further encouraged to take a pragmatic and practical approach in relation to the acceptance of these certificates in the exercise of control procedures in accordance with the MLC, 2006 and article X (Control) and regulation 1/4 (Control procedures) of the 1978 STCW Convention.

Ship Sanitation Certificates

The Ship Sanitation Control Exemption Certificate/Ship Sanitation Control Certificate SSCEC/SSCC are regulated in articles 20 and 39, and Annex 3, of the International Health Regulations (IHR) (2005). These certificates are valid for a maximum period of six months. This

period may be extended by one month if the inspection or control measures required cannot be accomplished at the port.

Extraordinary temporary measures

Governments are invited to request the submission of the Maritime Declaration of Health by all arriving ships. In the absence of information of valid suspicion or confirmed active case(s) of COVID-19 on board reported through the Maritime Declaration of Health, or by the Master, or their agents in accordance with Article 28(4) of the IHR (2005), issuing Administrations are encouraged to accept an exceptional extension of the above-mentioned certificates, and to notify shipowners, seafarers and relevant Administrations accordingly. They may:

- Provide for the extension of an existing Ship Sanitation Certificate by one month under Article 39(1) of the IHR (2005) on one or more occasions as necessary, provided that no authorized port along the ship's route is able to conduct ship inspection and issuance of sanitation certificates; and provided that such exceptional extension does not extend beyond the termination of the current public health emergency of international concern by the WHO Director-General.
- Exempt from national restrictions of movement the inspectors and key personnel responsible for ship inspections and issuance of Ship Sanitation Certificates.
- Ensure that they can perform ship inspections and implement health control measures in good conditions and appropriate protective measures against COVID-19. These personnel should receive training and sufficient resources (personal protective equipment, cleaning and disinfection products) as per WHO interim guidance for *Rational use of personal protective equipment for coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)*¹ and *Operational considerations for managing COVID-19 cases/outbreak on board ships*².

We invite Governments and other stakeholders to bring the contents of this joint statement to the attention of the competent authorities and all concerned.



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¹ https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331498/WHO-2019-nCoV-IPCPPE_use-2020.2-eng.pdf

² <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/operational-considerations-for-managing-covid-19-cases-outbreak-on-board-ships>