

INFECTIOUS DISEASES PROTOCOLS FOR SHIP AGENTS

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has amply demonstrated both the impact a “public health emergency of international concern”, (as defined in the WHO’s International Health Regulation) can have on the international maritime sector and the resilience, flexibility, and ingenuity of that sector in adapting to the changed circumstances and ensuring that goods continue to move.

The pandemic has also accelerated the use of digital technology and the streamlining of procedures to reduce the levels of personal contact required to ensure the requirements and obligations of the ship-port interface can be carried out, whilst also reducing opportunities for the spread of a communicable disease between the ship and shore. At the same time, concerns about the detrimental impact on the mental health of seafarers resulting from the cancellation of crew changes, reduced human contact and bans on shore leave, have increased significantly.

As the primary contact between the ship and the shore, the ship agent is deeply involved in all these issues and their continued engagement on operational, husbandry and pastoral matters is vital in keeping ships moving and international trade flowing, whilst also addressing the needs of the crew.

To ensure that ship agents can continue to provide the highest and widest possible levels of service to ships and their crews during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and any future public health emergency of international concern therefore, FONASBA has drafted these protocols.

COMPLIANCE WITH EXISTING REGULATIONS:

The ship agent operates alongside, and in concert with, all the stakeholders in the ship-to-shore interface and therefore complies with all necessary requirements, regulations and protocols including, but not limited to: the World Health Organisation *International Health Regulations 2005*, the International Maritime Organisation *Convention on Facilitation of International Maritime Traffic (the IMO FAL Convention)*, the European Commission *Guidelines for Border Management Measures to Protect Health and Ensure the Availability of Goods and Essential Services (C2020/1753)*, the International Chamber of Shipping *Guidance for Ensuring a Safe Shipboard Interface Between Ship and Shore-based Personnel (IMO Circular Letter 4024/Add.16)* and additionally guidance, protocols and requirements issued by national authorities, shipowners, port authorities and terminal operators. These FONASBA protocols are designed to operate alongside, and compliment, existing guidance, protocols, and requirements, but are not intended to override or supersede them, especially where they have legal effect.

METHODOLOGY:

For the sake of consistency, these protocols are based on the “Hierarchy of controls as a guide to establishing effective safety control measures and reducing risk” as detailed in the International Chamber of Shipping’s publication *Guidance for Ensuring a Safe Shipboard Interface Between Ship and Shore-based Personnel* mentioned above and endorsed by FONASBA. We are grateful to the International Chamber for permission to use the Hierarchy of Controls as a basis for these protocols.

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HIERARCHY OF CONTROLS¹:

1. Eliminate	<p>Elimination of the hazard is the most effective measure to reduce risks.</p> <p>Work onboard should not be conducted if there is a safer method to undertake the task, such as not going to a ship. In a number of instances, e.g. conducting audit, surveys inspections and training, remote possibilities exist which may eliminate the need to go onboard or reduce the numbers of personnel needing to attend.</p>
2. Reduce	<p>Can attendance onboard be reduced?</p> <p>Where it is not possible to fully eliminate the hazards, the risk could be reduced by minimising the onboard element of the work.</p>
3. Communicate	<p>If onboard attendance of shore-based personnel cannot be eliminated, communicate, and understand participant requirements.</p> <p>Ensure requirements of each party, the ship and shore-based organisation have been communicated in good time to each other and are assessed and understood.</p> <p>If there are differences in requirements, control measures should be agreed and understood by all parties prior to the shipboard intervention taking place.</p>
4. Control	<p>If the requirements of each party, the ship and the shore-based organisation have been communicated to each other and assessed, and are either not understood or there are differences, measures need to be taken so that all requirements are understood and so that requirements can be mutually agreed and understood by all parties prior to the shipboard intervention taking place.</p>
5. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	<p>Understand what PPE is required and expected to be used by crew and shore-based personnel during attendance on board and at what times.</p>

¹ Taken from the International Chamber of Shipping's publication "Guidance for Ensuring a Safe Shipboard Interface Between Ship and Shore-based Personnel" and reproduced with permission of the Chamber.

ACTIONS BY THE SHIP AGENT

1. Eliminate	<p>Elimination of the hazard is the most effective measure to reduce risks.</p> <p>Work onboard should not be conducted if there is a safer method to undertake the task, such as not going to a ship. In a number of instances, e.g. conducting audit, surveys inspections and training, remote possibilities exist which may eliminate the need to go onboard or reduce the numbers of personnel needing to attend.</p>	<p>Action should be taken by the agent to minimise unnecessary in-person contact with the vessel as a means of reducing the likelihood of transmission of the disease from the ship to shore or vice versa. At all times however, the agent must be mindful that one of their obligations is to provide appropriate pastoral care to the Master and crew. The right balance must therefore be struck between minimising contact and ensuring the crew receive the pastoral care they deserve.</p> <p>Where possible therefore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The exchange of documents and other operational information should be undertaken remotely• Physical attendance on the vessel should be limited to the minimum number of personnel required to carry out the tasks concerned• Contact with crew members should involve only those crew members and shore-based staff directly relevant to the matter under discussion• Meetings should be strictly time-limited to further reduce possible exposure• Visits to the vessel should be scheduled to minimise contact between different parties• Visitors to the vessel should use their own transport and avoid having other parties travelling in the same vehicle• Consideration should be given to meetings being held remotely, or outside the accommodation block where unavoidable <p>By eliminating the risk of cross-transmission of infections in other areas, and efficiently addressing the necessary administrative tasks, as detailed above, it is anticipated the agent will be able to devote appropriate time to the husbandry and pastoral needs of the crew.</p>
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<p>2. Reduce</p>	<p>Can attendance onboard be reduced?</p> <p>Where it is not possible to fully eliminate the hazards, the risk could be reduced by minimising the onboard element of the work.</p>	<p>The examples of elimination strategies detailed in section 1 above will, if implemented correctly, significantly reduce the levels of contact between the ship and shore and therefore minimise the risks of cross-infection. Any reduction in contact should however be assessed in the context of maintaining a minimum level of physical attendance at the vessel, consistent with the ship agent’s ability to provide adequate and appropriate service to the shipowner or operator, and the crew.</p>
<p>3. Communicate</p>	<p>If onboard attendance of shore-based personnel cannot be eliminated, communicate and understand participant requirements.</p> <p>Ensure requirements of each party, the ship and shore-based organisation have been communicated in good time to each other and are assessed and understood.</p> <p>If there are differences in requirements, control measures should be agreed and understood by all parties prior to the shipboard intervention taking place.</p>	<p>Communication between the ship, the operator, the charterer and shore-based service providers is key to the effective and efficient operation and administration of the port call. The need to additionally communicate infectious disease prevention and mitigation information and guidance should be fully integrated into the pre-call communication planning, with emphasis being placed on ensuring the earliest possible advice of appropriate measures in place onboard the vessel and in the port, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full information on all relevant disease mitigation protocols and regulations, including policies on the use of PPE (see control 5 below) • Information on cases of illness on board the vessel and any visits to healthcare professionals that may be required • Details and results of tests taken by the crew, passengers, and shore-based visitors • Information on the procedures, protocols and limitations relating to crew changes, both on and off-signing, and the precautions to be taken by arriving and departing crew members • A schedule of planned visits to the vessel and the number of persons involved • Information on any other visits, inspections, surveys, deliveries organised for the port concerned by the ship owner, operators or charterer, and the relevant contact details to allow same to be integrated into the visit plan • Details of how cargo operations will be managed

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedures for the remote exchange of documentation and for signing (if required) • Any additional information specific to the port, the vessel, the crew, and/or the call
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4. Control	<p>If the requirements of each party, the ship and the shore-based organisation have been communicated to each other and assessed, and are either not understood or there are differences, measures need to be taken so that all requirements are understood and so that requirements can be mutually agreed and understood by all parties prior to the shipboard intervention taking place.</p>	<p>Ensuring that all parties are fully informed of all aspects of the port call and the relevant procedures and protocols, and can apply them at the correct time, is vital to avoiding any confusion, conflicts, and other delays. Starting that conversation as early as possible after the destination country and/or port range are known, will allow for the fullest possible time for clarification and explanation to be provided where necessary, and the required procedures implemented. It will also ensure that all parties are fully briefed in advance and therefore able to carry out their obligations efficiently and effectively and with minimal interruption to the port call and cargo operations.</p>
5. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	<p>Understand what PPE is required and expected to be used by crew and shore-based personnel during attendance on board and at what times.</p>	<p>Information on company policies (both ship and shore) regarding the use of PPE and its disposal should be included as part of the initial information exchange, ensuring that both the crew and shore-based visitors are fully equipped prior to visits taking place. Again, any questions or concerns about its availability and use can be addressed in sufficient time to avoid any delays.</p> <p>Whilst evidence for surface-based transmission of infections (that is through touching surfaces and materials where viruses may be present) is not conclusive, good practice would indicate that appropriate precautionary actions, such as regular cleaning and</p>

		disinfecting, should be put in place to mitigate any risks from, for example, the handling of paper, touching door handles and guardrails
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