

Covid in the maritime setting FAQs

V3 27th April 2020 *(changes from V2 shown in red)*

The following are a set of FAQs which further interpret Government guidance on Covid19 for the maritime sector.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-staff-in-the-transport-sector/covid-19-guidance-for-staff-in-the-transport-sector>

Other useful contacts:

- (England only) Find your local Health Protection Team (HPT) here (<https://www.gov.uk/health-protection-team>)
- Contact details for Port Health Authorities (PHA) available here (<http://www.porthalthassociation.co.uk/>)

Summary of principles;

- Recent experience has shown that it is not possible to self-isolate on ships without the risk of continuing transmission
- PHE advice is to get people off ships wherever possible if Covid 19 is suspected.
- The same guidance applies as on shore; seriously ill people go to hospital, mildly ill and contacts self-isolate ashore.
- For cases, contact the HPT (in England) for advice on appropriate accommodation.
- For those crew members who have been in contact with a case ask the operators to arrange shore-side accommodation for self-isolation. HPT should be able to assist with this however ultimately the responsibility of crew welfare rests with the Master and ship owner.
- Health and safety of crew takes priority over berthing or mooring vessels.

Q1 Is there general guidance for the maritime industry to deal with Covid-19?

A Yes

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-shipping-and-sea-ports-guidance/guidance-for-shipping-and-sea-ports-on-coronavirus-covid-19>

Q2 Does this guidance cover all maritime situations?

A No. The above guidance sets out general principles, but because the maritime industry is so diverse, each incident will need to be assessed on a case by case basis. In England, the local Health Protection Team (HPT) will advise (similar but separate arrangements apply elsewhere in the UK).

Q3 Can a ship with suspected or confirmed Covid 19 cases dock at a UK port?

A Yes. The master should send a Maritime Declaration of Health to the PHA with details of illness on board and the PHA/LA will advise, in consultation with the local public health authority. In England, the local HPT will advise (similar but separate arrangements apply elsewhere in the UK).

Q4 Can a pilot join a ship with suspected or confirmed Covid 19 cases on board?

A Yes. Specific guidance has been issued for them (see Annex 1 below. This guidance covers PPE and social distancing. Pilots do not need to self-isolate after boarding a ship with suspected Covid 19 cases on board, as these individuals with suspected cases should be isolated in their cabins.

Currently, there is no change in PPE advice. Ships arriving in UK waters have no right to insist on pilots wearing additional PPE.

Q5 What is the risk of transmission of Covid-19 on board from air conditioning or sewage treatment systems?

A Not yet known, but is unlikely to be significant compared with contamination of surfaces from droplets. The wearing of overshoes is not recommended (they pose a greater safety hazard).

Q6 Does a ship with suspected or confirmed Covid 19 cases on board need to be quarantined?

A No. The ship should be allowed to dock as usual. This will allow easy access for affected individuals on board to be removed on shore if required and public health staff to board if required. If the ship is unable to leave the port, it can then be moved to a different anchorage if the berth is required for another ship.

Q7 Should a ship with suspected or confirmed Covid 19 cases on board be treated as a household?

A No. Individuals who are confined to their cabins should follow the same guidance as those confined at home. This does not mean that everyone on board automatically has to self-isolate for 14 days. As the living conditions on different ships vary widely, each case will be considered individually. In England, the local HPT will advise (similar but separate arrangements apply elsewhere in the UK).

Q8 What should happen to suspected or confirmed cases of Covid 19 on board?

A The same guidance applies as for domestic cases. At present, only seriously ill cases should be transferred to hospital (as an urgency). The local HPT will advise on ambulance transfer (similar but separate arrangements apply elsewhere in the UK). Symptomatic individuals who are not seriously ill should ideally be transferred for care ashore, if this is available, but may need to be confined to their cabins on board if this is feasible. They should self-isolate for 7 days.

Q9 What should happen to asymptomatic contacts of suspected or confirmed cases of Covid 19 on board?

A Given the close proximity of living conditions on board the majority of ships, it is usually more problematical to identify close contacts compared those with a lower likelihood of exposure, depending on the size and configuration of the ship. As with domestic cases, close contacts should self-isolate for 14 days, ideally ashore but on board if unavoidable, bearing in mind the likelihood of contacts becoming symptomatic and contributing to continuing transmission on board.

Q10 Is testing available for people on board a ship with suspected Covid 19 symptoms?

A The situation with testing is changing progressively as the capability is ramped up. At present, in England, essential workers are now eligible for testing but tests need to be booked and there are issues about access to testing sites. There is, as yet, no specific arrangements for mariners. Different arrangements may apply elsewhere in the UK.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested#history>

Q11 if a ship leaves port with a suspected case of Covid-19 on board, how can it be ensured that it will not affect others on board?

A This needs to be carefully assessed on a case-by-case basis with the PHE HPT prior to sailing. It is preferable that cases, or suspected cases, do not remain on board, but there may be circumstances where this is essential and the health of affected individuals is not being put at risk (i.e. either a very mild illness or someone testing positive who is asymptomatic). In such circumstances, suspected cases should self-isolate (see Q9).

Also, the length of the proposed journey is important - short voyages will be less risky than long ones and ships with small crews may be more vulnerable to safety being compromised than larger ones. In making a decision to sail, consideration must include realising that though self-isolation may reduce the likelihood of transmission to others, it will not eliminate it completely.

Q12 Are there any plans to introduce thermal screening at ports?

A Not at present. Current advice is that this is unreliable, as some cases of Covid-19, or pre-symptomatic individuals incubating the disease, do not have a fever.

Q13 Can crew from ships with suspected or confirmed Covid 19 cases on board be allowed ashore?

A Providing they are not close contacts, they should be allowed ashore for limited exercise and essential shopping, as long as they observe the same social distancing precautions as the rest of the community.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people>

14 Does social distancing guidance apply to both large and small ports?

A Yes. See above.

Q15 Does social distancing guidance apply to off-shore wind-farm and offshore oil & gas vessels?

A Yes, insofar as it is possible to. Specific guidance has been produced by Health Protection Scotland. (Link to follow when available)

Q16 Will PHE (or similar public health authorities elsewhere in the UK) advise on safe manning levels for a ship to leave port?

A No. This is not within public health area of competence.

Q17 What input does PHE have in the HSE Guidance on Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR)

A Not known. All queries about the interpretation of these regulations should be made to HSE.

Q18 Is it against international law for a ship to sail with Covid-19 cases on board?

A No. There is no applicable international law; there are the International Health Regulations 2005, but their status is as a treaty between Member States. There is, however, a moral obligation to prevent onward transmission to other countries. PHE HPTs will advise on measures to prevent onward transmission on a case-by-case basis.

Q19 What actions are currently being taken with respect to the provisions in the Guidelines on protection of health, repatriation and travel arrangements for seafarers, passengers and other persons on board ships?

We are generally supportive of the recommendations outlined by the EU and already implemented a range of measures prior to the publication of this guidance. The UK welcomes the guidance particularly in relation to the responsibilities shipping operators and the flag state as we have already taken measures to repatriate British nationals and we are currently monitoring the status of vessels with British crew members to ensure their safety and welfare. In relation to crew changes, the UK is supportive of the EU guidelines to allow crew changes at all ports as this is instrumental to the flow of goods and a letter was sent to UN organisation's a few weeks ago confirming our position on this. We are currently engaging further with the industry to see what more could be done to facilitate crew changes globally. There are some differences in relation to the health measures adopted by the UK as not all vessels are the same and therefore the same blanket approach cannot be used for all maritime settings. Therefore, any incidents on board vessels have to be considered on a case by case basis and masters will need to seek advice from the local Health Protection Team.

[https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1587132931038&uri=CELEX:52020XC0414\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1587132931038&uri=CELEX:52020XC0414(01))

Annex 1

Coronavirus Resilience: Maritime Pilot Transfer Arrangements - suggested procedure at UK ports - 31 March 2020

This guidance note has been prepared in consultation with a collection of UK maritime trade associations (British Ports Association, UK Maritime Pilots' Association, UK Harbour Masters' Association and UK Major Ports Group) and is designed to give some non-prescriptive options to help pilotage authorities remain resilient. There are a wide variety of pilotage options around the UK and our approximately 500 maritime pilots are an important component in facilitating a wide number of shipping movements, helping to maintain supply chains and trade. Pilots and other port and maritime operatives have been identified as 'Key Workers' by the Government and therefore expected to carry out their roles in as normal a way as possible whilst being mindful of advice on limiting the potential spread of COVID-19. The guidance is intended to supplement other local transfer advice such as already exists or be integrated, either in full or in part, where appropriate. It does not attempt to alter or replace the safety advice contained in the Pilotage Boarding and Landing Code or any Workboat Codes merely highlight procedures that will contribute to limiting the risks presented by infectious diseases such as COVID-19. The guidance is non statutory and harbour authorities may wish to use sections as appropriate.

Suggested procedures:

Like many Key Workers in other occupations, it will not always be practically possible to follow the Government's guidance to maintain a two-metre distance at all times during pilotage and pilot cutter operations. However the following measures could greatly reduce the likelihood of spreading COVID-19 if followed closely as far as practically possible but subject to review:

- Prior to boarding a cutter, the coxswain and crew should ensure they are not suffering with any of the symptoms of COVID-19 nor are any members of their household, i.e. the people they live with (in this case they should self-isolate in line with Government guidance)
- The cutter crew shall have all washed their hands thoroughly prior to boarding the cutter
- The coxswain/crew shall ensure that the cutter is clean and that appropriate areas such as handrails and seats are wiped down with a soap-based or disinfectant solution or wipes after each run. They should also aim to have an on board supply of hand sanitiser/wipes which are used regularly, especially on entry into the cabin
- Where possible the cutter should be as ventilated as possible with fresh air
- The pilot shall also be symptom free, having thoroughly washed their hands prior to boarding
- If the pilot is joining from a ship, the cutter crew should where possible provide disposable hand wipes to the pilot and have a suitable way to dispose of them after use
- Pilots should observe the highest precautions with their own health and to minimise exposure whilst on board the cutter, and minimise physical contact with

cutter crew members if not essential or use of gloves where possible, maintaining as much distance as practical

- To aid physical distancing, for some operations the Competent Harbour Authority may wish to limit the number pilots transferred on a single cutter and, subject to boat size and seating arrangements attempt to maintain as close as is possible to a 2 metre space for those on board
- Consumption of food or drink whilst on board the cutter should be avoided unless essential
- Prior to boarding or landing the Pilot, the coxswain can, if possible, confirm via radio with the master of the ship that previous advice provided to the harbour authority/VTS that all on board are healthy. Some authorities may choose to seek this confirmation through their VTS.