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Managing COVID-19 cases and outbreaks on board ships

Introduction

As you have been already aware there is transmission of 2019 coronavirus (COVID-19) disease in many countries around the world. The mentioned Corona Virus it's a virus which can lead to respiratory disease and pneumonia and it is transmitted through human-to-human via respiratory droplets or direct contact with an infected person.

We have collected various advisory from well-reputed sources (World Health Organisation, International Chamber of Shipping, POEA etc.) in order to provide you with some guidance regarding the prevention of a corona virus case onboard the vessel and how to deal with a suspected case if exists onboard the vessel.

Human-to-human transmission of COVID-19 is understood to occur primarily through droplets from a person with COVID-19, e.g. from coughing and sneezing, landing on objects and surfaces around the person. Other people then catch COVID-19 by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. People can also catch COVID-19 if they breathe in droplets from a person with COVID-19 who coughs, sneezes or breathes out droplets.

It is of vital importance to identify the symptoms of COVID-19, **the main symptom** of a person affected by Corona Virus is an acute respiratory illness - **Fever** and at least one sign/symptom of respiratory disease e.g. **Cough** and **Shortness of Breath**.

Protective Measures Against COVID-19 for Seafarers

When someone infected with a respiratory disease, such as COVID-19, coughs or sneezes they project small droplets containing the virus. Sneezing or coughing into hands may contaminate objects, surfaces or people that are touched. Standard Infection Protection and Control (IPC) precautions emphasise the vital importance of hand and respiratory hygiene.

- **The Master should establish a plan in order for the temperature of all crew onboard to be measured on daily basis and to identify if any crew member has fever. Relevant records must be kept (create a list with name / rank / temperature and keep it updated on daily basis).**
- Frequent hand washing by crew using soap and hot water or alcohol- based (at least 65–70%) hand rub for 20 seconds; *It is of vital importance the seafarers to clean their hands after coughing, sneezing, using tissues, or after possible contact with respiratory secretions or objects or surfaces that might be contaminated.*
- Avoidance of touching the face including mouth, nose and eyes with unwashed hands (in case hands have touched surfaces contaminated with the virus);

- Seafarers should cover their nose and mouth with a disposable tissue when sneezing, coughing, wiping and blowing the nose then dispose of the used tissue immediately;
- If a tissue is not available, crew should cover their nose and mouth and cough or sneeze into a flexed elbow;
- All used tissues should be disposed of promptly into a waste bin;
- Seafarers should aim to keep at least one metre (3 feet) distance from other people, particularly those that cough or sneeze or may have a fever. If they are too close, other crew members can potentially breathe in the virus;
- Face masks may provide some protection – especially if there is a risk of exposure when interacting with persons from outside the ship – the routine use of face masks is not generally recommended as protection against COVID-19. WHO advises that it is appropriate to use a mask when coughing or sneezing. If an individual is healthy, it is only necessary to wear a mask if the person is taking care of a person with the suspected COVID-19 infection
- Meat, milk or animal products should always be handled with care, to avoid cross-contamination with uncooked foods, consistent with good food safety practices. *The Cook must be instructed not to serve uncooked ingredients which are not canned.*
- During port calls the Master should allow embarkation to the vessel only for individuals that they have to perform a specific task onboard. The human presence onboard should be eliminated as much as possible.

Handling of a COVID-19 Suspected Case

If any suspected case of vessel's personnel identified onboard, the following actions should be implemented:

- The affected person MUST be immediately isolated in vessel's hospital and to wear a face mask continuously.
- All crew members that had close contact with the affected person to be isolated in their cabins independent if they have symptoms or not until further notice.
- Anyone entering the isolation room (hospital or cabins) MUST wear gloves, impermeable gowns (you can use the chemical suits available onboard), goggles and medical masks.
- Inform immediately the office in order to arrange for medical assistance, to provide specific instructions and to inform relevant Authorities.