

Isolating crew on board ships

Background

Outbreaks of influenza and other respiratory viral diseases such as Novel Coronavirus can occur among the crew of foreign trading ships. Early detection, prevention, and control of are important, not only to protect the health of crew, but also to avoid spread of disease into home and visiting ports by disembarking sick crew and/or exposing them to shore workers going onboard.

Purpose

This document provides guidance for ships originating from mainland China and arriving in Queensland waters and ports and focuses on preventing the spread of the Novel Coronavirus, including personal protective measures for crew members and control of outbreaks.

Guideline

Commercial maritime travel is characterized by the movement of people in closed and semi-closed settings. Like other close-contact environments, these settings can facilitate the transmission of influenza viruses and other respiratory viruses from person to person through droplet spread or potentially through contact with contaminated surfaces.

Specific management should include early identification and isolation of crew members with (virus), encouraging good respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette.

Respiratory Hygiene and Cough Etiquette

People with Novel Coronavirus symptoms that include fever, flu-like symptoms, cough, sore throat, headache or difficulty breathing should be advised of the importance of covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or cloth. Used tissue/cloths should be disposed of immediately in a disposable container (e.g., plastic bag) or a washable bin. Crew members should be reminded to wash their hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. If soap and water are not available, they can use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser.

Managing Crew with symptoms while onboard

Crew members with virus symptoms should take the following actions:

- Notify the Master.
- Report to the infirmary for medical evaluation, according to shipboard protocols.
- Remain isolated in their cabins, quarters or other suitable location onboard.
- Continue to practice respiratory hygiene, cough etiquette, and hand hygiene after returning to work, because respiratory viruses can continue to be shed for long periods after symptoms resolve.

Crew members who are experiencing severe illness should seek medical care as soon as possible and be evaluated. While temporarily in common areas, crew members with virus symptoms should be encouraged to remain as far away from others as possible (at least 1 metre), and either wear P2 face masks or cover their mouths and noses with a tissue or cloth.

Managing crew following exposure to a person with virus symptoms

Passengers and crew members who may have been exposed to a person suspected of having the Novel Coronavirus should monitor their health for **14 days** after the possible exposure. Upon disembarkation, a crew member with virus symptoms should be referred to a healthcare facility off the ship. The facility should be informed before arrival. The crew member should wear a face mask when travelling to healthcare facility.

Preventing Novel Coronavirus in Crew Members

The following recommendations should be followed, when possible, by crew members whose work activities involve contact with others who have virus symptoms:

- Maintain a distance of 1 metre from the sick person while interviewing, escorting, or providing other assistance.
- Keep interactions with sick people as brief as possible.
- Limit the number of people who interact with sick people. To the extent possible, the sick person should receive care and meals from a single person.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Wash your hands with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser.
- Ask the sick person to wear a face mask, and provide one, if wearing it can be tolerated.
- Provide tissues and access to soap and water and ask the sick person to:
 - Cover his or her mouth and nose with a tissue (or face mask) when coughing or sneezing.
 - Throw away used tissues immediately in a disposable container (plastic bag) or a washable trash can.
 - Wash his or her hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds.
 - If soap and water are not available, the sick person should use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

References

Center for Disease Control and Prevention *Guidance for Cruise Ships on Influenza-like Illness (ILI) Management* retrieved 4 February 2020 from <https://www.cdc.gov/quarantine/cruise/management/guidance-cruise-ships-influenza-updated.html>