

# SIU COVID-19 TASKFORCE UPDATE



DEC 11, 2020

## Seafarers' International Union of Canada COVID-19 Taskforce Update December 11, 2020

SIU COVID-19 Taskforce

Chair: Josh Sanders, Vice-President Great Lakes and West Coast  
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Welcome to the most recent communications update from the SIU's COVID-19 taskforce. The SIU's taskforce has met regularly since the start of the Pandemic in March 2020 and with the onset of the "Second Wave" and some instances of misinformation being shared by the Companies, has made the decision to share information whenever necessary to keep SIU members up-to-date with current information as well as provide a straight line of communication so that the Union can provide you with our direct perspective and opinions on issues of concern such as shore leave, shipboard protocols, etc.

### I. Overview

As of December 8, 2020, the situation across Canada is as follows:

- 429,035 total cases (+45,567 since last update)
- 71,968 active cases (+5,599 since last update)
- 12,867 deaths (+656 since last update)

In the most recent COVID-19 daily Epidemiology report issued by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), the Agency noted The majority of cases (66.6%) and deaths (86.4%) have been reported by Ontario and Quebec. In the 7 days up to December 8, 2020, Ontario has reported 12,711 cases while Quebec has reported 11,192. Both Alberta and British Columbia have seen dramatic increases in infections over this same period and are trending poorly, with the government of Alberta recently implementing a ban on all gatherings after months of standing back, in hopes of allowing businesses to continue to operate uninterrupted.

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The report also outlined that:

- Of the 395,844 total cases that have been reported in Canada since the onset of the Pandemic, the age group with the highest number of reported cases is people aged 20-29 years old (73,433) representing 18.6% of all cases.
- Of the 395,844 total cases to date, 25,058 cases (7.4%) were hospitalized. Of the 25,058 hospitalized, almost 5,000 were admitted to the intensive care unit and roughly 1000 people required mechanical ventilation.
- These facts greatly highlight the importance of getting the virus back under control to prevent the disproportional risk to those over 60 years of age.
- Importantly, it must be noted that infections, hospitalizations and deaths have been reported in every single age group, including in children.

On December 8<sup>th</sup>, the U.K. became the first country in the world to begin mass vaccinations against the coronavirus, with a 90 year old woman becoming the first person in the world to be given the Pfizer vaccine. It was the first of 800,000 doses of the vaccine that will be dispensed in the country in the coming weeks, with up to four million expected by the end of the month.

On December 9<sup>th</sup>, U.K. regulators warned that people who have a history of serious allergic reactions shouldn't receive the Pfizer vaccine. Two people among those inoculated on the 8<sup>th</sup> suffered from adverse reactions from the vaccine, leading the U.K regulator to issue a warning to anyone with a history of significant allergic reactions to vaccines, medicine or food.

Also on December 9<sup>th</sup>, Health Canada approved the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine, a key step toward launching the biggest inoculation program in our country's history. It announced this week by the Prime Minister that several hundred thousand doses of the vaccine will be available in Canada before the end of the year. The vaccines will be first available to long-term care home residents and staff working there, before it is available to the general public. The government has yet to announce the strategy for distribution of the vaccine to the general public.

Links:

<https://health-infobase.canada.ca/covid-19/epidemiological-summary-covid-19-cases.html>

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-55227325>

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/coronavirus-covid19-canada-world-december9-1.5833848>

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<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/vaccine-rollout-plan-phac-1.5833912>

## II. The SIU's role in other COVID-19 related Groups

Your Union is involved in every high-level discussion taking place with regards to the marine sector and Transport Canada as well as communicating regularly with all of the Companies and union delegates to ensure best practices and information are shared as needed during these difficult times.

The SIU Continues to participate in all high-level meetings taking place with the Federal government related to COVID-19 and the marine industry. On December 3<sup>rd</sup>, the SIU participated in an update call with Transport Canada and marine sector stakeholders to discuss updates to information in ship safety bulletins, the outcome of the COVID-19 Tiger team, ongoing work to enhance COVID-19 protocols as well as issues concerning shore leave regulations for foreign seafarers.

Links for Updated Ship Safety Bulletins from Transport Canada related to COVID-19:

“Revised Temporary Measures Regarding Marine Personnel Certificates, Discharge Books, Marine Medical Certificates & Marine Counter Services” – SSB NO.:21/2020:

<https://tc.canada.ca/en/marine-transportation/marine-safety/ship-safety-bulletins/revised-temporary-measures-regarding-marine-personnel-certificates-discharge-books-marine-medical-certificates-marine-counter-services-oral-examinations-can-now-be-administered-virtually>

“Mobility of Asymptomatic Workers in the Marine Sector During COVID-19” SSB NO.:18/2020:

<https://tc.canada.ca/en/marine-transportation/marine-safety/ship-safety-bulletins/mobility-asymptomatic-workers-marine-sector-during-covid-19-ssb-no-18-2020>

## III. COVID-19 Cases on SIU Vessels

As of December 9, 2020, the situation on board is as follows:

- 0 Vessels Currently Dealing with Active Cases
- 4 Vessels with Cases Previously on Board - Resolved and Returned to Operation

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- 11 Confirmed Cases since Pandemic Started
  - 0 Active Cases
  - 10 Resolved Cases
  - 1 Deceased

**If you are feeling unwell – please immediately alert your direct supervisor and the Captain of the vessel** so that the proper precautions can be taken. It may not be a COVID-19 exposure, but all risks must be mitigated to ensure the health and safety of yourself and the rest of the crew. When a case occurs, the SIU has worked to ensure that members are isolated, receiving medical care and provided with support to ensure the process is as stress-free as possible.

If there is a situation occurring on board your vessel that you feel compromises your health or safety (breach of COVID-19 Company protocols, lack of PPE, unsafe visitors on board, etc.), please communicate these incidents to your ship's Union Delegate who can get in touch with a local SIU official. If the situation requires immediate attention, do not hesitate to contact the Union ASAP.

As the SIU has now had the unfortunate experience of dealing with COVID-19 on board a few vessels, we are compiling data and protocols from various responses to positive incidences in order to share best practices amongst the Companies and ensure protocols for dealing with COVID-19 on board the vessels are up-to-date and adequate to ensure our members health and safety remains the top priority.

#### IV. SIU's Position on Shore Leave

As the situation with COVID-19 evolves rapidly, there is significant consideration and evaluation of available information happening every day. Obviously, the safest place to be when you are working is on board the vessel. We strongly encourage members to restrict shore leave as much as possible and to take advantage of Company ordering systems where possible.

However, the SIU does recognize the importance of shore leave, especially for seafarers' health and mental well-being. In Ports where the risk of exposure remains relatively low, the SIU remains in support of permitting shore leave when it is requested by a member.

If you choose to disembark from the vessel to take shore leave, please ensure:

- You follow your Company's protocols for shore leave requests and for reducing the risk of exposure.

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- Wear the proper PPE (mask, gloves, etc. as needed)
- Maintain good hand and respiratory hygiene (Wash hands frequently, use a Health Canada approved hand sanitizer, cough or sneeze into a tissue or the bend of your arm. Avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth)
- Practice social distancing (Remain at least 2 metres apart from any other person)
- Limit social contact (avoid closed spaces, crowded spaces and close contact)
- Follow local and/or Provincial public health guidelines for the area you are visiting.

## V. Restrictions on Shore Leave

Shore leave can be an important element for ensuring seafarers' health and well-being. The SIU does not support any full bans on shore leave. The SIU has agreed to support shore leave restrictions in the following ports only\* (as of December 9, 2020):

- All U.S. Ports
- All Quebec Ports excluding Sept Iles and Baie-Comeau
- Bowmanville
- Oakville
- Oshawa
- Clarkson (Peel Region)
- Port of Toronto
- Port of Hamilton
- Windsor

\*Please keep in mind that some Ports may be unavailable for shore leave based on local or Provincial restrictions outside of anyone's immediate control (Atlantic Bubble, Restricted Zones for inter-regional travel, etc.)

This list is subject to change at any time to reflect updated information as determined by local public health agencies and at the discretion of the SIU. Please be advised that the situation in certain areas are being closely monitored as COVID-19 cases are trending upwards and changes may need to be made quite rapidly.

**If you request shore leave and are denied shore leave in any Port that is not listed above,** please immediately inform your ship's delegate and contact the Union so that a Grievance may be filed. Please make sure to document the instance (Location, time, reason for going ashore,

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reason given for denial, etc.) as the Union will require this information for the grievance process.

## VI. Members Who are at Home or Returning to Work

Please ensure that you are following public health recommendations and doing your part to mitigate the possibility of exposing yourself or your families to COVID-19 when you are at home and not working. If you are planning for a return to work, or you are a sailing as a relief or any other position where returning home regularly, all measures must be taken to ensure COVID-19 is not brought back to your vessel and that you are in good health when joining.

The SIU **recommends** that all members returning to a vessel from STO, or joining a vessel as a relief, wear a non-medical mask for their first 14 days after returning to the vessel in order to better protect your fellow crew members from any potential exposure to COVID-19.

For information on non-medical face coverings and proper use, please visit the link: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/covid-19-safely-use-non-medical-mask-face-covering.html>

Most companies will require you to complete a COVID-19 Questionnaire about your current health, contact and travel history prior to boarding when joining a vessel. **Please complete these questionnaires truthfully as otherwise you are putting the health of your crewmates in jeopardy. If your health changes after boarding the vessel, please alert a supervisor immediately so that proper precautions can be taken to ensure your health and protect your brothers and sisters on board.**

## VII. International Shipping Issues

Globally, there are upwards of one million seafarers being affected by the ongoing and unresolved crew change crisis that has gripped the worlds' seafarers. Hundreds of thousands of seafarers have been stuck on board well past the maximum time permitted under the Maritime Labour Convention of 11 months at sea. At the same time, hundreds of thousands of other seafarers have been stuck on the beach, unable to join vessels or secure employment and are suffering terrible economic situations in their respective countries as a result. Some seafarers will be facing their second consecutive Christmas away from home, away from their families and friends. Please spare a thought for them during the Holiday period.

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In late November, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) announced that it will be ending the temporary exemptions for vessels to have seafarers on board for longer than 11 months. As of February 28, 2021, AMSA, through Port State Control, will enforce the limit of 11 months irregardless of the Pandemic. The Canadian maritime sector unions issued a joint letter this week, advocating for Transport Canada to also set a firm deadline for enforcement of the 11-month length of service under the MLC, in parallel to that established by AMSA.

In other important news globally, the ILO Governing Board has taken exceptional action by adopting a Resolution to address the dire situation of seafarers trapped at sea because of the Pandemic. The Resolution refers to the “immense risk that seafarer fatigue represents for the physical and menal health of individual seafarers and for the safety of navigation, security and the protection of the marine environment.”

The SIU continues to play an active role in the ITF and through our work in the ILO and IMO and we continue to call on nations and organizations to designate seafarers as key workers, facilitate crew changes and open borders for marine sector workers who continue to keep global supply chains working all while enduring tremendous personal suffering. Enough is Enough.

For updates on the situation, please visit the ITF website:

<https://itfseafarers.org/en>

<https://www.itfglobal.org/en>

*The SIU reminds all members that they must follow Company policy regarding COVID-19. The above recommendations/opinions from the SIU COVID-19 Task Force may differ from Company policy*

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