

# SIU COVID-19 TASKFORCE UPDATE



**JAN 8, 2021**

## **Seafarers' International Union of Canada COVID-19 Taskforce Update January 8, 2021**

SIU COVID-19 Taskforce

Chair: Josh Sanders, Vice-President Great Lakes and West Coast  
Members: Charles Aubry, Vice-President St. Lawrence and East Coast  
Chris Given, Director of Government Relations  
Paul Macdonald, HQ Representative (Thorold)  
Philippe Marchand, HQ Representative (QC)

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 January 6, 2021, the situation across Canada is as follows:**

- 626,799 total cases (+138,161 since last update)
- 79,203 active cases (+2,893 since last update)
- 16,369 deaths (+2,453 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 have been reported by Ontario and Quebec. In the 7 days up to January 6, 2021, Ontario has reported 21,795 cases while Quebec has reported 18,177. The number of cases in Alberta continues to rise, with the province recording 7,073 cases within the past week.

The report also outlined that:

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- The report states that of all people tested (14,243,625), 4.2% have been found to be positive for COVID-19.
- The majority of cases are still being seen in the 20-29 age group at 18.6% of cases, while those in the above 80 age group are more likely to have more serious symptoms, with a 32.9% hospitalization rate.
- Importantly, it must be noted that infections, hospitalizations and deaths have been reported in every single age group, including in children.

The COVID-19 vaccines from companies Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech have started to rollout in across Canada, with healthcare workers and the elderly in the first phase of citizens receiving the vaccine. The Federal government has been putting pressure on all provinces to speed up the rate of vaccination, with provinces like Ontario being slow to distribute the vaccine.

Some politicians, both federally and provincially, have been under fire in recent days after having travelled international over the Holiday season, despite warnings from health officials and the Prime Minister that doing so was a bad idea. This has resulted in multiple Members of Parliament and Provincial politicians to either resign or step down from some of their duties at the request of their Party leaders. Resignations and demotions have been seen in the federal Liberal, Conservative and NDP caucuses.

New concerns mounted over the Holidays regarding multiple new strains of the COVID-19 virus, first identified in the United Kingdom, that are said to be more contagious than the original virus. This has prompted another waive of uncertainty and fear among the medical community, however it is not yet certain if the new strain of the virus can be avoided with the current vaccines in production.

Lockdowns are once again in place in multiple provinces across Canada, including Quebec and Ontario, and these lockdowns are expected to be in place until at least the end of January. Ontario is set to reevaluate the lockdown in parts of Northern Ontario on January 9, 2020.

Links:

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

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/covid-19-ontario-january-6-2021-ford-newser-1.5862929>

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<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/checkup/what-concerns-you-about-covid-19-the-variant-and-the-vaccines-1.5858452/how-concerned-should-canadians-be-about-the-u-k-strain-of-covid-19-1.5859277>

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/david-sweet-covid-travel-1.5861069>

<https://montreal.ctvnews.ca/here-s-what-you-can-and-cannot-do-under-quebec-s-covid-19-curfew-1.5257126>

## 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:

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<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 January 7, 2021, 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
- 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

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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.
- 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 has agreed to support shore leave restrictions in the following ports only, as a result of recent lockdown conditions across the country\* (as of January 8, 2021):

- All U.S. Ports
- All Quebec Ports
- All Ontario Ports

\*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.

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**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, 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

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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.

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.

On December 17, 2020, the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Committee of Experts sent a strong message to governments that they have failed in their duty of care towards seafarers under international law during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the first ruling of its kind, the committee of 20 eminent jurists has found that governments have failed abjectly to protect the minimum standards for the protection of seafarers' rights, as set out in international law under the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) 2006. This includes basic rights such as access to healthcare, repatriation, annual leave and shore leave. The finding follows submissions made by the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and of the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS).

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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