

# SIU COVID-19 TASKFORCE UPDATE



## Seafarers' International Union of Canada COVID-19 Taskforce Update February 26, 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)  
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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 February 23, 2021, the situation across Canada is as follows:**

- 852,269 total cases (+41,472 since last update)
- 30,677 active cases (-8,502 since last update)
- 21,762 deaths (+853 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 February 23, 2021, Ontario reported 7,383 cases while Quebec reported 5,479 cases. These numbers have continued to decrease in recent weeks, trending similar to what was reported in our last taskforce update. Lockdown measures were recently lifted in many regions within both provinces, so it will be interesting to see how the number of cases will change within the next week or two. Hopefully we will to see case numbers decrease,

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however, it is expected that both provinces will see another increase due to the relaxed restrictions. British Columbia has again recorded just over 3,000 cases over the past 7 days.

The report also outlined that:

- Of all tests administered (23,880,652) 3.7% have been found to be positive for COVID-19.
- The majority of cases are still being seen in the 20-29 age group at 18.7% of cases, while those in the above 80 age group are more likely to have more serious symptoms, with a 33.2% hospitalization rate.
- Importantly, it must be noted that infections, hospitalizations and deaths have been reported in every single age group, including in children.

COVID-19 vaccination rollouts are beginning to ramp up across the country, with the federal government continuing to insist that anyone who wants a vaccine will be able to get one by the end of Summer 2021. The Government of Quebec recently announced that as of next week (March 1, 2021) those born in 1936 and earlier in the general population will be able to get vaccinated. The government specified that an exception will be made for people aged 70 and over who act as a primary caregiver for someone aged 85 and over. This means that a younger spouse of someone who meets the criteria may also be eligible. So far, more than 350,000 Quebecers have received shots, accounting for less than four per cent of the population.

In Ontario, the government is suggesting that further details should be expected soon about how their vaccine rollout will unfold, however, the province seems to be falling behind on the actual results of mass inoculation. The Government expects to receive a steady supply of COVID-19 vaccines in the coming weeks, and the province said this week that they hope to begin vaccinating adults in the general population aged 80 and over by the middle of March. Questions still remain about why the province has taken this long to get to this point in their vaccination rollout. As of this past Monday, just 247,042 people in Ontario had received both doses of a vaccine to be fully immunized against the virus.

The government of British Columbia will be announcing how they will rollout the COVID-19 vaccine next week, with seniors 80 and older and long term care workers expected to be the first in line. Some experts have criticized the governments plan, stating that they should be prioritizing essential workers over seniors.

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On the East Coast, we've seen the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador struggling in recent weeks after a COVID-19 outbreak spread within a high school in the St. John's area. The outbreak has been attributed to a new strain of COVID-19 – the B117 variant – the mutation of the virus that was first identified in the United Kingdom that is said to be 50% more transmissible than the original coronavirus strain. Up to this point, the province, and the East Coast as a whole, has done exceptionally well in containing outbreaks and the spread of the virus. Since the onset of the Pandemic in March, Newfoundland and Labrador have seen just 963 cases of COVID-19, however, 555 of those cases have come this month.

With some parts of the country beginning to reopen, we want to remind Members of the SIU of Canada to remain vigilant, stay safe, wear a mask and take care of your families. While we are thankful that the restrictions that were in place helped bring the number of cases back down across the country, there is no doubt that once these measures are lifted, the number of cases will again begin to rise, so to this end, please stay safe and stay healthy.

Links:

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

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/covid-19-vaccines-quebec-1.5924125>

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/covid-19-ontario-february-23-2021-cases-update-1.5924278>

<https://bc.ctvnews.ca/details-on-b-c-s-mass-vaccination-plan-coming-next-week-1.5321681>

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/nl-covid-feb-24-1.5925883>

## 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. Your Union is currently in discussions with all of our companies regarding protocols for fit-outs this spring.

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SIU officials participated in a “Focused Engagement Session” with industry stakeholders hosted by Transport Canada regarding interim orders in place concerning COVID-19 in the marine sector.

The restrictions that were in place to restrict pleasure craft and cruise vessels carrying over 100 passengers was extended to February 28, 2022. The restrictions, which were set to expire on February 28, prohibit pleasure craft in Canadian Arctic waters and cruise vessels carrying more than 100 passengers in all Canadian waters.

The SIU of Canada has requested information from Transport Canada on the issue of validity periods for seafarers’ certificates. Seafarers’ Certificates with an expiration date between October 2019 and March 2021 were extended to March 31, 2021, however no additional extension has so far been granted. We continue to work with and press Transport Canada to ensure these deadlines continue to get extended as needed and the SIU continues to seek more information regarding the availability of courses, particularly for those employed on vessels requiring an MED refresher in order to remain compliant with the STCW 2010 Manila Amendments.

Although certificates are being extended until March 31, 2021, we encourage any seafarer seeking to renew their certificate of competency to do so.

You simply need to follow these 2 easy steps:

- Scan the relevant pages of your discharge book and signed testimonials, if applicable; and
- Send the scanned information by email to your local Transport Canada Marine Examination Centre.

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>

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“Mobility of Asymptomatic Workers in the Marine Sector During COVID-19” SSB NO.:28/2020:  
<https://tc.canada.ca/en/marine-transportation/marine-safety/ship-safety-bulletins/mobility-asymptomatic-presumed-non-covid-19-carrying-seafarers-marine-sector-during-covid-19-pandemic-ssb-no-28-2020>

### III. COVID-19 Cases on SIU Vessels

As of February 25, 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

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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.
- 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 February 25, 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

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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, 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 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

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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.

On January 26, 2021 the ITF alongside over 300 industry and human rights leaders in the marine transportation sector signed the *Neptune Declaration*. This is a new global pledge with a focus on resetting expectations and putting accountability on the industry to use their leverage to end the deepening crew change crisis. Signatories include major multinationals like BP, Cargill, Rio Tinto and Shell. Signatories are expected to deliver on a shared responsibility to resolve the crisis, an initiative led by the Global Maritime Forum.

ITF General Secretary, Stephen Cotton, welcome the commitments of the 327 organizations and companies stating: “The ITF welcomes the commitment from shipowners, charterers, investors, NGOs and industry groups in signing the *Neptune Declaration*, and now there is an expectation that words are turned into action”. The 4 main pillars of the Neptune Declaration are to;

- Recognise seafarers as key workers and give them priority access to COVID-19 vaccines
- Establish and implement gold standard health protocols based on existing best practices
- Increase collaboration between ship operators and charterers to facilitate crew changes
- Ensure air connectivity between key maritime hubs for seafarers

As a result of new strains of COVID-19 being found in several countries including the UK and South Africa that scientists are saying may be more contagious than the original virus, immigration authorities in certain countries like the Philippines are now reimplementing restrictions regarding crew change policies. The Philippines, the world’s leading crewing provider and a top destination for crew changes during the pandemic, has decided to halt crew changes for seafarers who have been in 21 different countries around the world two weeks prior to visiting the Southeast Asian republic.

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.

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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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