

# SIU COVID-19 TASKFORCE UPDATE



## Seafarers' International Union of Canada COVID-19 Taskforce Update March 22, 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 March 18, 2021, the situation across Canada is as follows:**

- 922,848 total cases (+29,330 since last update)
- 29,280 active cases (-899 since last update)
- 22,590 deaths (+286 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 March 18, 2021, Ontario reported 9,989 cases, an increase of almost 2000 cases since our previous update, while Quebec reported 4,762 cases, consistent with the 7 day numbers we saw in our previous update. British Columbia has seen 3,830 cases over the last 7 days, while the East Coast as a whole has seen 38 cases this past week.

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The report also outlined that:

- Of all tests administered (26,250,445) 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, followed by the under 19 age group at 17.1%. Those in the above 80 age group are more likely to have more serious symptoms, with a 32.7% hospitalization rate.
- Importantly, it must be noted that infections, hospitalizations and deaths have been reported in every single age group, including in children.

The Ontario government is continuing its vaccine rollout plan, and reports are suggesting that they may be ahead of their original schedule. This past week we saw those in the above 80 age group able to book appointments to receive the vaccine and it was announced on March 19 that Ontarians aged 75 and older will begin to be able to start scheduling a COVID-19 vaccine as of Monday, March 22. Adults aged 75 and older were set to become eligible by the first week of April, but the province is moving ahead because more than half of residents 80 and older have now gotten at least one dose of a vaccine, Premier Doug Ford stated. While the vaccine rollout continues to make progress, worries are beginning to mount in the Province about a 'third wave', with the growing spread and severity of COVID variants in many communities.

The Government of Quebec has also continued to make steady progress to get residents of the province vaccinated, and as of right now, all Quebecers who are 65 and older are eligible to book appointments for a COVID-19 vaccine. So far, more than 830,000 vaccine doses have been administered. The Government also announced an ambitious plan to attempt to vaccinate nearly every Quebecer by June 24, 2021, St. Jean Baptiste day. As of March 19, reports state that 10% of Quebecers have now received a first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

The British Columbia government provided an updated vaccine timeline for residents on March 18, which estimates that up to 25% of B.C.'s population could be immunized against the COVID-19 virus by mid April. The province also announced Thursday it is aiming to have an online booking portal active starting April 6 for seniors 65 and older, booking appointments beginning on April 19.

In Atlantic Canada, discussions are currently underway regarding reinstating the East Coast "bubble", which has been attributed to keeping many communities on Canada's East Coast relatively unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic. "For a long time, we have been able to keep

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our borders tight, and that's proven successful, and the previous Atlantic bubble was very successful, so I'm eager to see that (opening) happen," Nova Scotia Premier Iain Rankin told reporters Thursday. The first Atlantic bubble was created at the beginning of July last year, and was suspended in November after case counts began to rise again during the second wave of the epidemic. Newfoundland and Labrador's participation in a reformed Atlantic bubble will depend on the province making progress after an outbreak that swept through the St. John's area last month, the premiers' statement said.

Links:

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

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/covid-19-ontario-march-19-2021-pharmacy-vaccines-1.5956094>

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/covid-19-in-quebec-need-to-know-march-19-1.5956066>

<https://globalnews.ca/news/7705305/when-do-i-get-my-covid-vaccine-british-columbia/>

<https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2021/03/18/how-does-canadas-east-coast-keep-weathering-covid-19-reforming-atlantic-bubble-to-mark-latest-victory.html>

## 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.

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.

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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>

“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>

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## III. COVID-19 Cases on SIU Vessels

As of March 21, 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 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.

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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, with the conditions in each region being monitored closely.\* (as of March 22, 2021):

- All U.S. Ports
- Port of Montreal
- Thunder Bay
- Hamilton
- All GTA Ports
- Oshawa
- Welland Canal
- Hamilton
- Windsor
- Sarnia
- Parry Sound
- Meldrum Bay

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\*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, 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**

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**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.

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.

In February 2020, Nautilus Federation, which represents 22 trade unions affiliated to the ITF, issued a statement calling on governments and global organisations to coordinate a worldwide vaccination programme for seafarers and inland waterways transport crew. The Federation believes that a mass vaccination program for maritime and shipping professionals would help address the crew change crisis while ensuring seafarers do not miss out on vaccinations while travelling for work. Their statement notes that vaccination policies and authorizations by Governments differ globally, and it calls for seafarers to have access to vaccines in other countries and to ensure that the vaccine given is also one that is authorized by their country of domicile.

The statement also asks that:

- Any vaccinations authorised by the WHO be recognised as valid for seafarer travel and transit through any national jurisdiction
- Seafarers who have not yet been able to receive a vaccination to be permitted to travel to and from their country of domicile and their place of work without restriction for the duration of the global seafarer vaccination programme

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- An education programme targeted towards seafarers to counter the effects of anti-vaccination propaganda

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*