

# SIU COVID-19 TASKFORCE UPDATE



## Seafarers' International Union of Canada COVID-19 Taskforce Update April 16, 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  
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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 April 14, 2021, the situation across Canada is as follows:**

- 1,087,152 total cases (+66,313 since last update)
- 80,201 active cases (+19,902 since last update)
- 23,445 deaths (+304 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 and deaths have been reported by Ontario and Quebec. In the 7 days leading up to April 13, 2021, Ontario reported 28,018 cases, an increase of over 8000 cases since our previous update, which had already seen a dramatic increase from the week prior. Quebec reported 11,229 cases, an increase of around 3000 compared to our previous update. British Columbia's case numbers in the past week have also

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increased compared to our previous update, with the province reporting 7,885 cases. On the East Coast, the provinces have reported a combined 125 cases in the past week.

The report also outlined that:

- Of all tests administered (29,251,338) 3.8% have been found to be positive for COVID-19.
- The majority of cases are still being seen in the 20-29 age group at 18.8% of cases, followed by the under 19 age group at 17.7%.
- Those in the above 80 age group are more likely to have more serious symptoms, with a 31.5% hospitalization rate.

The SIU of Canada has recently had an outbreak of COVID-19 on board the Atlantic Huron. Our thoughts and prayers are with those who have tested positive and their families during this difficult time. We are happy to report that the crew is in good spirits and are being well taken care of in Thunder Bay at the time of writing. No crew member is experiencing any severe symptoms, and we hope this doesn't change! Stay strong and stay safe.

Ontario's third wave continues to devastate the province, with record numbers of COVID-19 cases being reported seemingly everyday. At the time of writing, the province currently has over 35,000 active COVID-19 cases, an all time high. Despite these staggering numbers and a stay-at-home order currently in effect, anti-lockdown protests were held across the province of Ontario and Quebec, where individuals refused to wear masks, and many did not social distance. Ironically, gatherings of this nature are sure to extend provincial lockdowns, as more cases will arise from events like these. The SIU of Canada encourages all Members to continue following public health guidelines, and protect yourselves as best you can.

Quebec's vaccination rollout continues to do well compared to the neighbouring province of Ontario, with the Government of Quebec sticking to their pledge that they plan to have all Quebec residents vaccinated by June 24. A gym in Quebec City has provided an interesting and frightening example of just how quickly the COVID-19 variants can spread. The Méga Fitness Gym became a major source of contagion for the B117 variant first identified in the United Kingdom. The gym was shut down on March 31, as the city was once again put under lockdown, however 222 people contracted the variant at the gym before its closing. The outbreak is now the subject of an epidemiological investigation but some of the specifics of how the virus spread are being kept confidential

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COVID-19 case numbers are also continuing to climb in the province of British Columbia, with the Premier John Horgan stating on April 13<sup>th</sup> that further restrictions could be on their way to help curb the spread of the virus. As of April 13, 1,148,993 doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered in B.C., including 87,785 second doses.

Links:

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

<https://www.stcatharinesstandard.ca/news/niagara-region/2021/04/10/defying-provincial-stay-at-home-orders-anti-lockdown-protesters-march-through-st-catharines.html>

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/superspreading-event-canada-megagym-quebec-1.5985744>

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/covid-19-update-dec-1-1.5985707>

## 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.

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.

Any Certificate of Competency, that otherwise would have expired between October 1, 2019 and March 15, 2020 (but which was extended by previous Ship Safety Bulletins) is now further

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automatically extended until June 30, 2021. Any Certificate of Competency, that otherwise would have expired between March 16, 2020 and June 30, 2021 (but which was extended by previous Ship Safety Bulletins) will now remain valid until the earlier of; 15 months from the date of expiry on the face of the certificate, or December 31, 2021.

Although certificates are being extended until June 30, 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 04/2021:

<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-ssb-no-04-2021>

“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 April 14, 2021, the situation on board is as follows:**

- 1 Vessels Currently Dealing with Active Cases
- 6 Vessels with Cases Previously on Board - Resolved and Returned to Operation
- 23 Confirmed Cases since Pandemic Started
  - 10 Active Cases
  - 12 Resolved Cases
  - 1 Deceased

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**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.
- Wear the proper PPE (mask, gloves, etc. as needed)

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- 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

As of April 16, 2021, the SIU of Canada is recommending that all Members not go ashore in any port for at least a period of two weeks and the Union supports any interim orders put in place by the companies. The current situation with COVID-19 ashore is dire, and until the situation begins to improve and the number of cases begins to decrease, the SIU urges Members to stay on their ships.

Note: This 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.

## 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>

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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, the COVID-19 Pandemic continues to afflict hundreds of thousands of seafarers working in international trade who remains subject to restrictions on repatriations, shore leave and access to medical care.

The ITF has continued to reiterate its strong request for seafarers and aviation workers to be prioritized by Governments for COVID-19 Vaccination programmes. In March 2021, a joint statement of support for the ITF's position was issued by the WHO and other United Nations bodies. The ITF has asked global Governments to recognize the sacrifices made by seafarers by prioritizing them in all national vaccination programmes and requests that these workers be placed in priority groupings alongside key medical and health workers and prior to the general population.

The ITF has also worked with the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) to produce a simply, easy-to-understand guide for seafarers on COVID-19 vaccinations. The independently-produced guide explains the evidence-based risks associated with the major vaccine brands currently in the market.

The SIU continues to play an active role in the ITF and through our work in the ILO and IMO and other international forums, and we continue to call on all nations and organizations to designate seafarers as key workers, facilitate crew changes, prioritize seafarers for vaccination 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>

<https://www.itfglobal.org/en/news/shipping-industry-launches-vaccine-guide-seafarers>

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*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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