

SIU COVID-19 TASKFORCE UPDATE



Seafarers' International Union of Canada COVID-19 Taskforce Update April 23, 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 21, 2021, the situation across Canada is as follows:

- 1,147,463 total cases (+60,311 since last update)
- 89,167 active cases (+8,966 since last update)
- 23,763 deaths (+318 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 21, 2021, Ontario reported over 30,000 cases, breaking records seemingly everyday for the number of cases in the province. Quebec reported 9,366 cases, down around 2000 compared to our previous update. British Columbia reported 6,881 cases over the last week, down slightly from our previous update. On the East Coast, the provinces have reported a combined 149 cases in the past week.

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The report also outlined that:

- Of all tests administered (30,274,366) 3.9% have been found to be positive for COVID-19.
- The majority of cases are still being seen in the 20-29 age group at 18.9% of cases, followed by the under 19 age group at 17.9%.
- Those in the above 80 age group are more likely to have more serious symptoms, with a 30.9% hospitalization rate.

The SIU of Canada released a Press Release this week demanding immediate action on a plan to vaccinate Canadian seafarers against COVID-19. The Union has been working for months to try to get answers from all levels of government as to how they plan to vaccinate seafarers who reside in all provinces across the country, and the provincial governments have yet to provide an appropriate response. The Union is now demanding an immediate plan, and a meeting with the federal Minister of Health, Patty Hajdu, in order to get answers, or risk a total shutdown to the Canadian shipping industry. The Union is prepared to take drastic action to get answers from those in power. Media outlets across the country have reported on the story, which will surely get the attention of those in decision-making positions. The SIU of Canada is also encouraging all Members to email the Minister of Health themselves, using a draft email that can be found on the SIU website here: [Letter to Minister of Health](#)

The Province of Ontario continues to have no control over the spread of the COVID-19 virus, with over 30,000 cases reported this week alone. The Premier and the governing Conservative Party have shown themselves to be completely incapable of making the right decisions to keep people safe, with lockdown restrictions that do little to address the main causes of the spread of infection. After a disastrous press conference where Premier Ford stumbled over his words, and failed to answer a single question from the public, the Premier was not seen for days following. The office of the Premier stated that Doug Ford was now in isolation after being in close contact with someone who tested positive for the virus. The federal government is currently considering enacting the Emergencies Act, which would see governing power go to the federal government, similar to the War Measures Act, to help put a stop to the rampant spread of the virus.

Quebec government continues to do an exceedingly better job at vaccine distribution than their Ontario counterpart, and this in combination with lockdown measures has kept a third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic at bay. Since December, Quebec has administered more than 2.4

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million doses of the vaccine, and the province continues to vow to give a first jab to any adult who wants one by June 24, 2021. Premier Legault recently reminded the people who reside in the province that what is happening in Ontario is a reminder that the situation remains very fragile and the health care system is nearing capacity in various regions.

While British Columbia has been able to manage the spread of the virus fairly effectively, mutant strains of COVID-19 continue to threaten the province. B.C. health officials confirmed more than three dozen cases of a COVID-19 variant first detected in India that's being looked at as a possible contributor to rampant spread of the virus in that country. The Ministry of Health said the province had identified 39 cases of the B.1617 variant as of April 4, but that it hadn't been flagged as either a variant of concern or variant under investigation at that point.

Links:

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

<https://www.seafarers.ca/seafarers-union-warns-of-total-shutdown-to-canadian-shipping-industry-if-vaccination-plan-is-not-developed-immediately/>

<https://globalnews.ca/news/7776034/covid-doug-ford-isolation/>

<https://globalnews.ca/news/7768752/quebec-astrazeneca-vaccine-age-limit-lowered/>

<https://globalnews.ca/news/7779311/double-mutant-covid-19-variant-cases-confirmed-bc/>

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 to strengthen protocols in order to combat the more contagious variants of concern.

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.

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 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

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As of April 22, 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

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

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.

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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, 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

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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>

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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