



Seafarers' Frequently Asked Questions: COVID-19

1) My contract has ended but my company can't repatriate me due to port restrictions. Is my contract extended until I am repatriated?

Many seafarers are being asked by their companies to extend their contracts by at least a month. With many countries, such as India and the Philippines, locking down it is probably best to consider remaining on board and extending your contract as it is unlikely that you will be able to fly home even if you can leave the vessel and exit the port.

Extending the contract should only be used with appropriate safeguards to protect seafarers, such as obtaining their consent and ensuring that they do not lose their accrued annual leave or right to repatriation. Check with your flag state to see if ship owners can extend this flexibility to you without being in danger of breaching their MLC obligations.

Your employer will be liable to pay you for any such extension of your tour of duty.

During this period you will still be entitled to all your other MLC/Seafarer Employment Agreement (SEA) rights. Check with the flag State if in doubt as to MLC implementation on your ship.

2) I have managed to leave the vessel but I can't leave the country due to no flights back to my home country. Will I still be paid by my company?

Under the MLC your company should be responsible repatriating you and for paying you until you reach home in accordance with your SEA. If for any reason your company is not paying for your accommodation costs while you wait for your flight you should contact your union if you are a member. If the ship owner does not pay for your repatriation and associated expenses, such as accommodation, food, medical bills, etc, then you may need to call the MLC financial security provider (details available on board, but usually the P&I Club) to cover these costs. You can also contact your embassy or consulate. Local seafarer missions may also be able to assist.

3) I am due to start a new contract and join a vessel but I cannot leave my country.

Ship owner organisations and unions around the world are trying hard to get governments to allow free movement of seafarers for crew changes. Stay in contact with your crewing agency or company, and take advice from your union. The industry is doing its best to keep ships and trade moving, and consequently trying to facilitate the movement of seafarers.

4) I am concerned about my family back home. What can I do?

It is important for you to stay in contact on a regular basis with your family back home. If you are on board your company and/or the internet provider may provide extra data or calls at a free or reduced rate. If you are worried and feel anxious then contact SeafarerHelp or one of the seafarer welfare missions.

5) I am on board and I think that I have a fever. What should I do?

You have a duty to protect yourself while at sea and a duty to protect others who may be affected by your activities.

You should follow the general advice published by the World Health Organization (WHO), The International Maritime Health Association (IMHA) and The International Chamber of Shipping (ICS). There may also be a company policy (check their website) and perhaps flag state advice

You should also seek advice from the onboard medical officer and inform your line manager/master.

6) I am feeling depressed and anxious about the Coronavirus Pandemic

It is only natural to feel anxious about the current situation. If you are onboard share your concerns with your fellow crew. Don't keep constantly checking the news website. ISWAN has produced a video that provides guidance and information on what you can do to manage your mental health – see <https://bit.ly/ISWANMH1>

There are organisations that you can contact – SeafarerHelp, the seafarer welfare missions

7) Are seafarer centres still open?

Unfortunately, most of the seafarer centres around the world are now closed. However, many of the chaplains and welfare workers are still working, supporting seafarers. To contact a local chaplain or welfare worker please see the seafarer centre directory at <https://www.seafarerhelp.org/en/seafarers-directory>

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