



International
Chamber of Shipping

Shaping the Future of Shipping

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Seafarer Shore Leave Principles



This document sets out principles for providing shore leave during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. It supersedes and replaces the joint industry guidance *Coronavirus (COVID-19): Seafarer Shore Leave Principles*. It also contains information on the international maritime obligations surrounding the provision of shore leave by state authorities and shipowners, and for seafarers.

1 The International Labour Organization Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (MLC, 2006)

The MLC, 2006 identifies measures required to assist in the provision of shore leave.

Regulation 2.4 states that seafarers must have adequate leave and be granted shore leave to benefit their health and well-being in line with the operational requirements of their positions.

Regulation 4.4 states that shore-based welfare facilities, where they exist, must be easily accessible to seafarers, and that port States must promote the development of welfare facilities.

2 Importance of shore leave for seafarers

Shipowners recognise the importance of shore leave to seafarers. Shore leave can help to mitigate fatigue and reduce stress from long voyages and a long time away from home. Providing access to shore leave can, however, be challenging. It can be influenced by many factors, including a ship's schedule, the time spent on a port call, conditions in certain ports and availability of port facilities for seafarers to gain the optimum benefit from shore leave. Lack of shore leave has far-reaching consequences. Not going ashore, or not accessing normal social respite and changes of scenery, can seriously impact seafarers' mental health. In addition, it is clear that governmental restrictions imposed to reduce risk of potential infection has had severe consequences on the ability of seafarers to take shore leave when in port.

3 The impact of COVID-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic, additional public health factors have made shore leave provision more difficult. The primary reason is to protect the health of the crew and ensure the safe operation of the ship. High local COVID-19 case rates in port areas pose significant risks to ships that are otherwise COVID-19 free and which may be at sea for a lengthy period and far from medical assistance after a port call.

COVID-19 has intensified problems seafarers face in taking shore leave. Some companies have felt it necessary to suspend shore leave to avoid the potential introduction of the virus to an otherwise healthy crew. Others have left it to the discretion of Masters. Companies are encouraged to conduct local risk assessments to identify ports where the number of cases and the transmission of COVID-19 have been reduced, seafarer movement is not unduly restricted by local laws and seafarers can go ashore when appropriate protocols are followed.

Access for port chaplains to visit ships for their usual purposes has also been limited due to public health restrictions. However, great lengths have been taken to ensure the delivery of assistance where possible. Some chaplains have delivered items to seafarers using buckets lowered onto the ship and welfare facilities are ensuring that all their vehicles and seafarers centres are hygienic and "COVID-19 safe" as and when seafarers return.

4 Busy work schedules

The amount of time available for seafarers to take shore leave can be a challenge in providing adequate opportunities for shore leave. Turnaround times for ships in ports have reduced – in some cases to as little as eight hours – while notifications of berth availability to ships before arrival at ports may cause shipowners to slow steam if space is not available. Ships now carry increasing amounts of cargo, thus increasing workloads in ports and affecting shore leave. Where possible, shipowners are encouraged to factor in some time in port for seafarers to have some recreation time.



5 Transportation and accessibility

Shoreside transportation and accessibility for seafarers is a problem in ports located in isolated regions. High prices may be charged by public and private transport providers to travel to the nearest towns. Some providers of welfare services to seafarers seek to offer transportation in ports where they have a presence.

Increased efficiency of loading and discharging operations prevents seafarers from moving too far from their ships if port tasks are completed faster than anticipated and the ship's sailing time is brought forward. Where seafarer centres are within the immediate port area, shipping companies should encourage their seafarers to utilise these facilities when taking shore leave.

6 Border entry challenges

Article 6, paragraph 6 of the ILO Convention 185 states that for the purpose of shore leave seafarers are not required to hold a visa. Any [ILO] Member that cannot fully implement this requirement must ensure that its laws and regulations or practice provide arrangements that are substantially equivalent.

Seafarers may not be permitted into a country due to strict visa requirements and nationality complications often preventing them going outside International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) zones.

COVID-19 border/entry measures have also resulted in shore leave sometimes being prohibited by authorities or, if permitted, seafarers facing enormous administrative requirements and obstacles. Where ships experience these problems, they are encouraged to report the incident to their flag State authorities or their national shipowner association so that concerns can be raised at an international level.

7 Encouraging shore leave

Shipowners are encouraged to:

- Conduct risk assessments on the safety of shore leave during the pandemic, taking into account the risks and benefits to their seafarers, ships and operations;
- Develop protocols or measures to mitigate and manage risks on granting shore leave;
- Identify ports or circumstances where shore leave may be granted to seafarers, subject to adherence with the protocols or measures and, where possible, increase the number of locations where seafarers can take shore leave as the pandemic declines;
- Recognise that a lack of shore leave is detrimental to seafarer physical and mental wellbeing and may have health and safety consequences; and
- Try to ensure that time is available to grant shore leave for seafarers when in port.

Port State and port/terminal authorities are encouraged to:

- Provide transport to nearby facilities that seafarers can visit and facilitate the transport of seafarers to areas or locations where they may wish to spend their shore leave;
- Take all reasonable steps to ensure seafarers can take shore leave in their ports;
- Facilitate the disembarkation of seafarers from ships for shore leave by minimising and removing administrative requirements and obstacles; and
- Facilitate access to welfare facilities and promote further development of their services and capabilities.

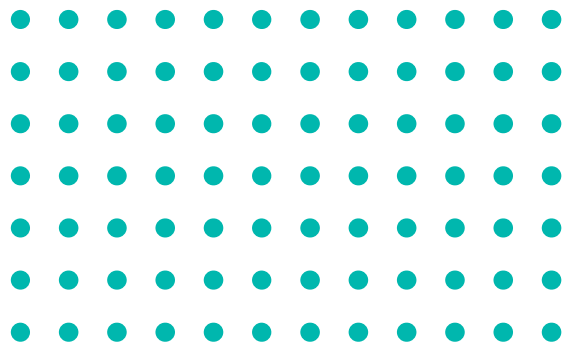
Seafarers and their representatives are encouraged to:

- Understand that it may not be safe to grant shore leave in some ports or circumstances during the pandemic.





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