
COVID-19

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This Technical Alert is issued by the Bahamas Maritime Authority (BMA) to provide information on COVID-19 (formerly called novel coronavirus or 2019-nCoV).

2. Introduction

- 2.1. As widely reported, COVID-19 has been associated with an outbreak of pneumonia type illness and cases are being reported worldwide.
- 2.2. Coronaviruses (CoV) are a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases, such as, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV). These viruses are zoonotic, meaning that they are transmitted between animals and people. A novel coronavirus (nCoV) is a new strain which has not been previously identified in humans.
- 2.3. Common signs of infection with this virus include:
- respiratory symptoms,
 - fever,
 - cough,
 - shortness of breath and
 - breathing difficulties.
- 2.4. In more severe cases, infection can cause:
- pneumonia,
 - severe acute respiratory syndrome,
 - kidney failure and
 - even death.
- 2.5. Standard recommendations to prevent the spread of this infection include:
- regular proper hand washing,
 - covering mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing,
 - thoroughly cooking meat and eggs and
 - avoiding close contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing.

- 2.6. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak an international pandemic (a worldwide occurrence of the virus) on 11 March 2020. The situation is evolving daily.
- 2.7. Owners/operators should ensure that standard recommendations to prevent the spread of infection are implemented on their ships.
- 2.8. Owners/operators should also ensure that they are aware of any local reporting requirements in their ships' areas of operation, in case of any crew members or passengers showing signs of infection.
- 2.9. Prior to entering ports identified as having been affected by the outbreak of COVID-19 owners/operators should make appropriate risk assessments and take appropriate measures.

3. Situation in The Bahamas

- 3.1. The Bahamas, in common with other States, has introduced significant restrictions on travel.
- 3.2. Further information is available from the [Bahamas government website](#).

4. Travel to Other Countries

- 4.1. Numerous travel restrictions are being put in place worldwide.
- 4.2. Be diligent, pay attention and equip yourself with travel advisory information related to COVID-19 before you travel.
- 4.3. If during, or after your travel, symptoms of respiratory illness are experienced, you are encouraged to immediately contact a medical provider who will guide you as to your next steps. Be ready to give your full travel history to health care providers.

5. Actions to be taken in case of suspected cases

- 5.1. Where COVID-19 is suspected, medical advice should be sought.
- 5.2. The advice of public health authorities in the country where the ship is located when cases are suspected should be sought and any instructions followed.
- 5.3. Owners/operators are requested to report any suspected cases of COVID-19 to the BMA by email: casualty@bahamasmaritime.com.

6. Extensions, postponements, etc.

As a result of the outbreak and the serious challenges it poses to the shipping industry, the BMA is taking a pragmatic and practical approach with regard to extensions, postponements, etc. as outlined below. These measures are temporary and their duration will be based on the global evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic.

6.1. Seafarer Employment

6.1.1. In cases where crew members may have to exceed the 12 months or contractual period onboard as stated in their original Seafarers' Employment Agreement (SEA) because of travel restrictions imposed due to the outbreak of the corona virus, The Bahamas will consider such extensions to be *force majeure* and therefore not a breach of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, (MLC) as amended.

6.1.2. In such cases, an entry shall be made in the ship's Official Logbook describing the situation and listing the crew members who have had to extend their stay.

6.1.3. A new SEA shall be arranged for the crewmembers in question, and it shall be stated that the seafarers are entitled to repatriation at no cost to the seafarer at one week's notice.

6.1.4. The following text shall be inserted in to the renewed contract:

The seafarer is permitted to terminate the contract giving 7 days' notice when the force majeure situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic permits personnel to travel to their destination safely and securely.

6.2. Expired Medical Certificates

6.2.1. If a seafarer's medical certificate expires whilst they are on board, the seafarer can continue their service for up to 3 months or until a new certificate can be issued, whatever comes first. If the medical certificate expires prior to 01 July 2020 the validity of the certificate is automatically extended to 01 October 2020.

6.2.2. If a medical certificate expires, an entry is to be made in the Official Logbook with reasons why it is necessary to extend the certificate.

6.3. Expired STCW Certificates and Certificates of Recognition (Endorsements)

6.3.1. If a Certificate of Competency (CoC) or a Certificate of Proficiency (COP) that The Bahamas has either endorsed or issued expires and the issuing State has extended the period for which the certificate is valid, this document/endorsement shall automatically be extended by The Bahamas for the same period.

- 6.3.2. If a Certificate of Competency (CoC) or a Certificate of Proficiency (CoP) that The Bahamas has issued expires prior to the 01 October 2020, the validity period is extended until latest 01 October 2020.
- 6.3.3. The BMA recognises that all CoPs that are issued by other States (these do not need to be endorsed) are valid for use on Bahamian ships for the period that the issuing State has allowed, including CoPs that are extended to no later than 01 October 2020.
- 6.3.4. Details of any expired STCW certificates are to be recorded in the Official Logbook.
- 6.3.5. All STCW, MLC and Minimum Safe Manning Documents will be issued electronically by e-mail during COVID-19 restrictions and will not be printed. The documents will be printed on their respective templates and couriered to clients as soon as the measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus have been lifted.

6.4. **Seaman's Record Books**

- 6.4.1. The BMA is currently restricted in the use of courier and mail services to send seaman's record books to clients.
- 6.4.2. Where seafarers are not in possession of a Seaman's Record Book, the BMA requests that the Master issues a Record of Service as stipulated in paragraphs 3.3 and 3.4 of [BMA Information Bulletin No. 107](#).
- 6.4.3. Notwithstanding the above, the BMA will still issue Seaman's Record Books and clients are encouraged to apply online through the BORIS electronic system. When the Seaman's Record Book is issued the BMA will send an electronic copy to the client to be used onboard.
- 6.4.4. The BMA will send the original Seaman's Record Books by courier as usual when full access to courier services is available.
- 6.4.5. Sea service may be transferred to the Seaman's Record Book from the Record of Service either by the Master who signed the Record of Service or by the Company.

6.5. **Bahamas Initial, Annual and Pre-Registration Inspections**

- 6.5.1. BMA inspectors have been instructed not to put themselves at risk and likewise not to put ship's crews at risk - this means they will follow the guidance of the health authorities in the country where they are located and may decline to attend ships.
- 6.5.2. Where an initial or annual inspection cannot be carried out before the end of the inspection window, the owner/operator shall advise the BMA Inspections & Surveys

department (tech@bahamasmaritime.com), providing full supporting information. Inspections should be carried out at the first port where an inspector is available.

6.5.3. The requirement for pre-registration inspections is waived until 30 June 2020 for ships up to 20 years of age. Ships over 20 years of age will be considered on a case by case basis and inspection requirements will be advised by BMA. For ships over 12 years of age, a pre-purchase or condition report should be submitted where available.

6.5.4. Notwithstanding para 6.5.3, all ships proposed for registration, with the exception of new builds, remain subject to a pre-registration technical documentation review.

6.6. **Surveys**

6.6.1. Where a surveyor is not able to undertake scheduled surveys due to restrictions imposed by COVID-19, including cancellation of scheduled dry docking and/or bottom survey, and remote survey is not practicable, the BMA authorises its Recognised Organisations to consider applications for extension/postponement under *force majeure* or unforeseen exceptional circumstances and administratively issue short term statutory certificates for up to 3 months without prior approval of the BMA*. This is to be followed up by a physical survey at the earliest opportunity.

6.6.2. For statutory surveys delegated to Bahamas Recognised Organisations, the Recognised Organisation shall consider the application, which should include full supporting information, before issuing short-term certification. The Master shall provide a statement to the Recognised Organisation confirming the structure or equipment to be surveyed remains fit for purpose and has not been subject to any damage.

6.6.3. Where the structure or equipment to be surveyed does not remain fit for purpose, or has suffered damage, or the Recognised Organisation does not support the application, the Recognised Organisation shall provide full details to the BMA. The BMA will consider on a case-by-case basis and provide instructions to the Recognised Organisation.

6.7. **ISM and ISPS Internal Audits**

6.7.1. Timely completion of ISM internal audits is amongst the most frequently reported difficulties. The BMA therefore temporarily permits extensions to annual ISM internal audits for up to 3 months, as per para 5.6 of [BMA Information Bulletin 23](#) and para 12.1 of the ISM Code, in cases where it is not physically possible to attend and remote audit is not practicable. This is to be followed up by a physical audit at the earliest opportunity.

6.7.2. The Company Security Officer may postpone internal ISPS audits for up to 3 months in cases where it is not physically possible to attend, and remote audit is not practicable. This is to be followed up by a physical audit at the earliest opportunity.

6.8. **ISM External Audits**

6.8.1. For interim ISM DOC audits where it is not physically possible to attend and remote audit is not practicable, the BMA may permit the issue of interim DOC upon receipt by the Recognised Organisation of a statement from the Company confirming that the safety management system is in place and meets the objectives of paragraph 1.2.3 of the ISM Code. This is to be followed up by a physical audit at the earliest opportunity.

6.8.2. The requirement for the Recognised Organisation to advise the BMA of any request for audit for the first issue of a Bahamas DOC, as per paragraph 4.4 of [BMA Information Bulletin No.23](#), remains in effect.

6.8.3. For interim ISM SMC audits where it is not physically possible to attend and remote audit is not practicable, the BMA permits the issue of interim SMC, without prior approval of the BMA, upon receipt by the Recognised Organisation of a statement from the Master confirming that the safety management system is in place and meets the objectives of paragraph 1.2.3 of the ISM Code. This is to be followed up by a physical audit at the earliest opportunity.

6.8.4. For initial ISM DOC and SMC audits where it is not physically possible to attend and remote audit is not practicable, the BMA permits the issue of a second interim DOC/SMC for up to 6 months, without prior approval of the BMA, upon receipt by the Recognised Organisation of a statement from the Company/Master confirming that the safety management system meets the objectives of paragraph 1.2.3 of the ISM Code. This is to be followed up by a physical audit at the earliest opportunity.

6.8.5. For SMC and DOC periodical audits, if these are not completed within the range date the certificate ceases to be valid as per ISM Code. In such circumstances, the Recognised Organisation may issue a new SMC or DOC valid for 3 months or until the audit can take place, whichever comes first, without prior approval of the BMA.

6.8.6. For SMC and DOC renewal audits, and noting the provisions of ISM Code 13.14, the BMA authorises its Recognised Organisations to issue 3-month extensions, where requested by the Company, to existing SMC and DOC Certificates, without prior approval of the BMA.

6.9. **ISPS External Audits**

6.9.1. For interim ISSC audits where it is not physically possible to attend and remote audit is not practicable, the BMA permits the issue of an interim ISSC, without prior approval of

the BMA, upon receipt by the Recognised Organisation of a statement from the Company Security Officer **AND** Ship Security Officer confirming that:

- i. A Ship Security Assessment has been completed.
- ii. A copy of the Ship Security Plan (SSP) is on board and there is evidence that the SSP has been submitted to the Recognised Organisation for approval.
- iii. The security measures identified in the Ship Security Plan are in place and the provisions of paragraph 19.4.2 of the ISPS Code have been met.

This is to be followed up by a physical audit at the earliest opportunity.

- 6.9.2. For initial ISSC audits where it is not physically possible to attend and remote audit is not practicable, the BMA permits the issue of a second interim ISSC for up to 6 months upon receipt by the Recognised Organisation of a statement from the Company Security Officer **AND** Ship Security Officer, as per 6.9.1.i to iii, without prior approval of the BMA.

This is to be followed up by a physical audit at the earliest opportunity.

- 6.9.3. For ISSC intermediate audits, if these are not completed within the range date the certificate ceases to be valid as per ISPS Code A19.3.8. In such circumstances, the Recognised Organisation may issue a new SMC or ISSC valid for 3 months or until the audit can take place, whichever comes first, without prior approval of the BMA.
- 6.9.4. For ISSC renewal audits, noting the provisions of ISPS Code A-19.3.5, the BMA authorises its Recognised Organisations to issue 3-month extensions, where requested by the Company, to existing ISSC Certificates, without prior approval of the BMA.

6.10. **Maritime Labour Inspections**

- 6.10.1. For interim MLC inspections where it is not physically possible to attend and remote inspection is not practicable, the BMA permits the issue of an interim MLC for up to 6 months, without prior approval of the BMA, upon receipt by the Recognised Organisation of a statement from the Company/Master confirming that:
- i. the applicable requirements of MLC 2006 have been met.
 - ii. An approved Declaration of Maritime Labour Compliance Part I is on board or evidence provided that it has been requested from the BMA.
 - iii. DMLC Part II is available in draft or evidence provided that it has been submitted to the Recognised Organisation.

This is to be followed up by a physical audit at the earliest opportunity.

- 6.10.2. For initial MLC inspections where it is not physically possible to attend and remote audit is not practicable, the BMA permits the issue of a second interim MLC for up to 6 months, without prior approval of the BMA, upon receipt by the Recognised Organisation of a statement from the Company/Master, as per 6.10.1.i to iii.

This is to be followed up by a physical audit at the earliest opportunity.

- 6.10.3. MLC 2006 does not provide for the issue of extensions to existing MLC Certificates without inspection. However, in this exceptional situation, the BMA authorises its Recognised Organisations to administratively issue a short-term Maritime Labour Certificate for 3 months, without prior approval of the BMA, in cases where the renewal or intermediate inspection cannot be conducted due to COVID-19 restrictions.
- 6.10.4. The Recognised Organisation shall state that the certificate has been issued to allow the ship to continue on its intended voyage and complete the inspection at the first port where inspectors are available. When the renewal or intermediate inspection has been completed a full-term Maritime Labour Certificate may be issued with its expiry date not later than 5 years from the expiry date of the original full-term Maritime Labour Certificate.

6.11. **Remote audits and surveys**

- 6.11.1. The BMA will consider requests for remote audits and surveys where supported by the Recognised Organisation.

- 6.12. **The Recognised Organisation shall provide a consolidated weekly report to the BMA (by email to tech@bahamasmaritime.com) of actions taken under paragraphs 6.6 to 6.10. The weekly report should be submitted by 1730UTC on the Wednesday of the following week.**

- 6.13. The temporary measures described in paragraphs 6.5 to 6.10 will remain in place until 30 June 2020 and are subject to review as the situation develops.

7. Certificates and Documents

- 7.1. Hard copy certificates will continue to be provided by the BMA as usual, provided that postal/courier services remain in operation.
- 7.2. The BMA may issue scanned copies of hard copy certificates in order to ensure that ships have copies of current documents on board.
- 7.3. The validity of any certificate can be verified by contacting the BMA.

8. Further information

8.1. Bahamas Ministry of Health:

- i. [Home Page](#)

8.2. World Health Organization:

- i. [Rolling Updates](#)
- ii. [Information and Guidance on COVID-19](#)

8.3. International Maritime Organization:

- i. [Circular Letter No.4204 \(31 January 2020\)](#)
- ii. [Circular Letter No.4204/Add.1 \(19 February 2020\)](#)
- iii. [Circular Letter No.4204/Add.2 \(21 February 2020\)](#)
- iv. [Circular Letter No.4204/Add.3 \(02 March 2020\)](#)
- v. [Circular Letter No.4204/Add.4 \(05 March 2020\)](#)
- vi. [Circular Letter No.4204/Add.5 \(17 March 2020\)](#)

8.4. Further information is also available from a number of industry bodies, governmental and inter-governmental agencies.

9. Validity

9.1. This Technical Alert is valid until further notice.