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4 ALBERT EMBANKMENT  
LONDON SE1 7SR  
Telephone: +44 (0)20 7735 7611 Fax: +44 (0)20 7587 3210

Circular Letter No.4231/Add.18  
5 March 2021

To: All IMO Members  
Intergovernmental organizations  
Non-governmental organizations in consultative status

Subject: **Communication from the Government of the Kingdom of Norway**

The Government of the Kingdom of Norway has sent the attached communication, dated 4 March 2021, with the request that it be circulated by the Organization.

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International Maritime Organization IMO  
4, Albert Embankment  
SE1 7SR  
London  
UNITED KINGDOM

## Guidelines for crew changes in Norway during the COVID-19 pandemic

The Norwegian Maritime Authority write to give an update on the measures taken by Norway in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Annexed to this letter, the Norwegian Maritime Authority provides updated guidelines for crew changes during the COVID-19-pandemic. The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of the Norwegian rules and guidelines that are relevant for seafarers, and to ensure the safety and security of the ship as well as the health and welfare of seafarers.

We consider the guidelines to be in compliance with The Norwegian health authorities' recommendations and regulations.

We kindly request that this information is circulated to the IMO Member States.

Yours faithfully,

Lars S. Alvestad,  
Acting Director General of Shipping and Navigation

*This document has been electronically approved and signed.*

Annex: Guidelines for crew changes in Norway during the COVID-19 pandemic.



## Guidelines for crew changes in Norway during the COVID-19 pandemic

Link to the Norwegian Maritime Authority website – updated version: [Covid -19 - Norwegian protocols with regards to crew change on ships - Norwegian Maritime Authority \(sdir.no\)](https://www.sdir.no/en/COVID-19-Norwegian-protocols-with-regards-to-crew-change-on-ships)

This document has been prepared by the Norwegian Maritime Authority (NMA) and contains information about rules relating to crew changes in Norway during the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of the Norwegian rules and guidelines that are relevant for seafarers. Please note that the Norwegian health authorities are responsible for legislation related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and that the legislation is regularly amended as the situation develops. Therefore, please refer to the links below that will keep you up to date. Please refer to the [COVID-19 Regulations](#) and other relevant legislation to read the entire texts.

The NMA considers these guidelines to be consistent with [the IMO guidelines for crew change](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For inquiries, please send an e-mail to [post@sdir.no](mailto:post@sdir.no) or call +47 52 74 50 00.

### 1 Information from Norwegian health authorities for representatives of shipping companies and shipping agents

The Norwegian Directorate of Health has published information about their expectations of shipping agents and companies managing seafarers in transit in Norway, as well as seafarers that intend to work on vessels in Norwegian ports. It is expected that shipping agents and companies are familiar with this information and share it with their seafarers prior to departure to Norway.

The information provided by the health authorities can be found here:

[Information on Norwegian health authorities' expectations of the representatives of shipping companies and shipping agents](#)

[Attachment 1: Information for non-Norwegian seafarers](#)

[Attachment 2: Declaration of consent for non-Norwegian seafarers in transit across the Norwegian border](#)

[Attachment 3: Symptoms form](#)

### 2 Registration required before entry into Norway

Persons arriving in Norway from an area that requires quarantine must complete a registration form prior to entry, cf. [Section 5b of the COVID-19 Regulations](#). This also applies to Norwegian citizens, and seafarers are not exempt.

The registration form must be completed prior to entry into Norway, and the travel must be registered no more than 72 hours before arrival. The form can be completed digitally. The receipt of a completed online registration must be presented to the police at the border check.

More information on registration, as well as a digital registration form, can be found [here](#).

## 3 Requirement for testing

### 3.1 Requirement to present a negative COVID-19 test prior to entry into Norway – exemption for seafarers ([section 4a](#))

Persons arriving in Norway from an area that requires quarantine must present a certificate of a negative SARS-CoV-2 test upon entry. The PCR test and the rapid antigen test are approved test methods, and the test must be taken no earlier than 24 hours prior to arrival in Norway. The certificate must be written in Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, English, French or German. The requirement of presenting a certificate does not apply to persons who, by means of an approved laboratory method, can prove to have had COVID-19 in the past six months.

A few exemptions from this requirement have been granted, including an exemption for seafarers en route to or from active service, with an identity card as specified in section 2-8 of the Immigration Regulations or a Philippine Seafarer's Identification and Record Book or a Philippine national passport as specified in [section 3\(1\) subparagraph j of the Regulations relating to entry restrictions for foreign nationals out of concern for public health](#). For a complete list of exemptions, see [section 4a of the COVID-19 Regulations](#).

### 3.2 Requirement for testing on arrival in Norway ([section 4d](#))

Persons who have stayed in a region that requires quarantine as specified in appendix A in the 10 days prior to arrival in Norway must be tested for SARS-CoV-2 at the border crossing point in Norway. The test must be an antigen rapid test or a PCR test. For anyone who gets a positive result from a rapid antigen test, a PCR test must be provided within 24 hours after arriving.

Exemption from the testing requirement is granted to arriving persons that are exempt from the duty of quarantine pursuant to [section 6a subparagraph c](#). For more information about the exemption, see 4.2.4 below.

The testing should, if possible, be done at the airport or other border station. If this is not possible, the traveller must contact the municipality or other test station to book a test. Tests are currently free of charge.

Seafarers may continue their trip after the testing if they don't have symptoms, and if the transport is according to the applicable regulations and recommendation for transport during entry quarantine. For more information about transport, see 4.4 below.

If the test result is positive, the person must be isolated immediately, and the employer or client must notify the municipality.

Seafarers must be in good health when entering Norway. Anyone who develops symptoms while travelling or at the border must immediately notify the tour guide, agent or border personnel, who will then contact a doctor/health personnel.

### 3.3 Requirement for test after stay in country with high occurrence of viral mutations ([section 4b](#))

Persons who have stayed in Great Britain, South Africa, Ireland, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal or Brazil in the 10 days prior to arrival in Norway shall be tested for SARS-CoV-2 with a PCR test at the border crossing point in Norway.

Persons who have stayed in the above-mentioned countries between 15 January 2021 and 25 January 2021 must as soon as possible be tested for SARS-CoV-2 with a PCR test. Testing is required even if the person has

been tested before 25 January 2021. The person must contact the municipality or a test centre and shall inform that the test request is due to a recent stay in one of the above-mentioned countries.

## 4 Quarantine requirements

### 4.1 On quarantine in general

The COVID-19 Regulations differentiates between entry quarantine and infection quarantine, cf. [section 4](#).

The main rule of the COVID-19 Regulations is that anyone arriving in Norway from a region that requires quarantine must undergo quarantine for 10 days. This also applies for transit in areas that require quarantine. Any period spent in regions that does not require quarantine immediately before entering Norway may be subtracted from the quarantine period.

Moreover, the quarantine period may be shortened by following the testing regime of [section 4c](#).

Persons undergoing entry quarantine must as a main rule stay in a quarantine hotel for the duration of the quarantine period. Nevertheless, the quarantine period can be spent at a suitable location provided by the employer or client. One such location would be a single cabin on board a ship if close contact with others can be avoided.

It is permitted to leave Norway during the quarantine period. For more information about transport, see 4.4 below. Persons in transit travelling directly from the airport or other place of arrival to the vessel are exempt from entry quarantine, provided that the vessel leaves the Norwegian port immediately. During the stay in Norway, however, Norwegian quarantine and testing regulations must be complied with.

Persons who develop acute respiratory infection with a temperature, cough or heavy breathing during the quarantine period, must contact the health services and be tested. Even when the test result is negative, the person must remain in quarantine for the duration of the period, and the quarantine exemptions no longer apply.

### 4.2 Exemptions from the entry quarantine requirement

There are some exemptions from the entry quarantine requirement of the COVID-19 Regulations. The most relevant exemption for seafarers is found in section 6h. We refer to the COVID-19 Regulations for a full overview of the exemptions.

#### 4.2.1 Exemption for workers arriving in Norway to start work on vessel in a Norwegian harbour ([section 6h](#))

Section 6h says:

“Persons arriving [in Norway] to take up work on a vessel at a Norwegian port shall remain in entry quarantine both during and outside working hours until they:

- a. have tested negative for SARS-CoV-2 in a test taken during the first 24 hours after their arrival in Norway, and
- b. have tested negative for SARS-CoV-2, using a PCR method, in a test taken no earlier than three days after arrival in Norway.

The worker must then remain in entry quarantine outside working hours. Quarantine on board the vessel can only be carried out in single cabins.

The employer or client is responsible for arranging, carrying out and covering the cost of tests in Norway.

The requirement in the first paragraph (b) does not apply to workers on their way to a vessel which is scheduled to leave a Norwegian port within three days after the worker's arrival in Norway and which will not call at a Norwegian port within 10 days after departure.

In the event of a positive test, the person must go into isolation (see section 7), and the employer or client must notify the municipality in which the person is staying, or last stayed if the ship has left the port.

This provision does not apply to coastal cruises, ships operating on passenger routes or vessels which are laid up."

A person who has had a negative test result with both types of tests referred to in the first paragraph (a) and (b) is permitted to carry out work on board. The person concerned must, however, undergo quarantine outside working hours until the quarantine period of 10 days is over.

The employer shall provide a suitable accommodation in a single room for the quarantine period. Quarantine on board must be undergone in a single cabin.

Seafarers that are exempt from quarantine during working hours must, to the degree possible, avoid close contact with other persons. In order to minimise the risk of infection, the employer must ensure that it is possible to maintain social distancing.

Seafarers en route to a vessel which will leave a Norwegian port within three days after arriving in Norway, and which will not call at a Norwegian port within 10 days of the departure, only need to do the first test.

If crew change is not possible pursuant to section 6h, the other exemptions listed below may be considered.

#### 4.2.2 Exemption from entry quarantine for workers after testing ([section 6c](#))

The exemption applies to persons living in the EEA or Switzerland arriving in Norway to perform work or services, provided that they do not come from an area with particularly high levels of infection. The conditions of section 6c must be met. See the attached link to the provision.

#### 4.2.3 Special exemption from the entry and infection quarantine for personnel in critical public functions ([section 6e](#))

Persons whose presence is essential to maintain the proper operation of critical public functions or attend to fundamental needs of the population, including persons who perform commercial transport of goods and passengers, may on certain conditions be exempt from quarantine during *working hours*.

Crew members who are part of the vessel's minimum safe manning, and who are needed to operate the vessel, may be considered "strictly necessary" to ensure responsible operation of critical public functions.

This exemption will only apply where strictly necessary in order to ensure the proper operation of the company, and where other exemptions of sections 6a to 6h cannot be applied before the person commences work. In acute situations where there is not time to wait for the PCR test results, a person may go to work if he has tested negative with a rapid antigen test on the day the work is being performed.

Exemption from the *infection quarantine* can only be granted where there is a risk of life- or health-threatening consequences.

The employer or client is required to plan for the operation of the company for the application of the exemption to be avoided to the greatest extent possible. The Norwegian Maritime Authority recommends that

assessments related to the application of the exemption of section 6e are logged or documented internally in each individual case.

#### 4.2.4 Exemption from entry quarantine for travellers who had a short stay in countries or areas with high levels of infection, etc. ([section 6a \(c\).](#))

Persons who sign on vessels in Norway crossing the territorial borders of Norway and only stay on board until the vessel is back in Norway, are exempt from entry quarantine when they return to Norway, provided that no passenger or crew member has boarded the vessel or been ashore in a foreign port. Ordinary cargo operations can be carried out in port, provided that close contact is avoided. Crew members may sign off.

#### 4.2.5 Exemption from entry quarantine for certain employers and clients ([section 6b](#))

The exemption applies to persons who frequently arrive in Norway from areas in Sweden or Finland that require quarantine, in order to work in Norway. The conditions of section 6b must be met. See the attached link to the provision.

#### 4.3 Infection quarantine ([section 4](#))

Persons who have been in close contact with someone who has been confirmed to have contracted the SARS CoV-2 virus less than 48 hours before that person developed the first symptoms of infection or from the time of testing if the tested person does not develop symptoms, are to undergo infection quarantine. The required quarantine period is 10 days after the contact.

#### 4.4 Transport to/from the vessel

Persons in transit must be transported from the border to the vessel/destination by the fastest route possible. A private vehicle should be the first choice of transport. Wearing a face mask during the entire voyage is compulsory when travelling on public transport. Furthermore, a distance of at least 1 metre is recommended, where possible. For public transport, it is recommended to book tickets ahead and make a seat reservation. Please see the Norwegian Institute of Public Health's [guidelines](#) for travelling with public transport.

If overnight accommodation is needed in order to board or leave the ship, the employer or client must provide a suitable quarantine location.

Persons in *infection quarantine* may in exceptional cases be allowed to use public transport upon approval by the municipal medical officer. A face mask must be worn during the entire journey.

[Link to sections 5 and 5a.](#)

## 5 Requirement for risk assessment

The NMA has published guidelines for [risk assessment and emergency preparedness in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic](#). These guidelines apply to Norwegian ships and are based on the requirements of [Regulations of 1 January 2005 No. 8 on working environment, health and safety for the persons working on board ship](#).

The COVID-19 virus is a biological agent, and the company shall perform a special risk assessment based on all available information, including facts and recommendations from competent national and international

authorities. Such risk assessment will be updated to reflect any changed circumstances and form part of the ship's safety management system.

The maritime industry has industry guidelines that provide additional information. Please see, for instance, [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Guidance for Ship Operators for the Protection of the Health of Seafarers](#), published by the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS).

## 6 Notification in case of suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19

Vessels arriving from abroad carrying suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 on board have a duty to notify Norwegian authorities in accordance with the provisions of [section 4 of the Regulations relating to notification of and measures in the event of serious incidents affecting international public health](#). The master of the vessel must notify the Norwegian Coastal Administration's vessel traffic services in Vardø by telephone (+47 78 98 98 98), and an online notification form must be completed at SafeSeaNet Norway.

## 7 Coastal cruises

Norwegian health authorities have developed a [Guide to coastal cruises along the Norwegian coastline \(Covid-19\)](#). The guide provides advice on how cruise companies ensure infection control and prevent accidental exposure to and spread of COVID-19 in a safe manner.

Before a company can begin operating coastal cruises along the Norwegian coast, a plan must be presented to the Norwegian Directorate of Health describing how the company will ensure compliance with the applicable infection control requirements, cf. [section 11 of the COVID-19 Regulations](#). The Norwegian Directorate of Health may approve the plan to start coastal cruises, provided that it describes adequately how the company will comply with the infection control requirements.

Link to [sections 11 – 11b](#).

### Contact details of the Norwegian Directorate of Health

E-mail: [postmottak@helsedir.no](mailto:postmottak@helsedir.no)

Postal address: Helsedirektoratet, postboks 220, Skøyen, N-0213 Oslo

Website: [www.helsedirektoratet.no](http://www.helsedirektoratet.no)

## 8 Useful links

- Regulations relating to infection control measures etc. in connection with the coronavirus outbreak: [COVID-19 Regulations](#) (in Norwegian)
- The Norwegian Government: [Registration of arrival to Norway – regjeringen.no](http://regjeringen.no)
- The Norwegian Health Authorities: [Coronavirus in Norway: Travel advice – helsenorge.no](http://helsenorge.no)
- Norwegian Institute of Public Health (FHI), on quarantine and isolation: [Quarantine and isolation – FHI](#)
- IMO Guidelines for crew changes during the COVID-19 pandemic: [MSC.1-Circ.1636 - Industry Recommended Framework Of Protocols For Ensuring Safe Ship Crew Changes And Travel.pdf \(imo.org\)](#)