

GUIDANCE ON PROTECTING CARGO HANDLERS FROM THE POTENTIAL RISK OF COVID-19

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Objective

To support Pacific Island Countries and Territories with guidance on protecting cargo handlers from COVID-19.

Background

The COVID-19 virus is a respiratory disease that is transmitted via droplets through close contact with infected individuals and bodily fluids following coughing and sneezing. These droplets may land on objects and surfaces around the infected person, and the virus can be contracted by touching these contaminated objects or surfaces. The main route of entry into a host is via the eyes, nose or mouth. People can also catch COVID-19 if they breathe in droplets from a person with COVID-19 who coughs, sneezes or exhales droplets.

Infection prevention and control (IPC) measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 include:

- Regularly cleaning your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or washing with soap and water.
- Maintaining at least one metre (three feet) distance between yourself and anyone whether they are coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.
- Practising good respiratory hygiene by covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze, then dispose of the used tissue immediately.
- Wearing homemade cloth masks when in public settings (e.g. supermarket, banks etc.) if social distancing measures are difficult to maintain. However, it is important to note that the use of a mask alone is insufficient to provide an adequate level of protection, and it is important to:
 - Avoid touching the mask once its on.
 - Change masks when moist.
 - Not leave masks dangling around the neck.
 - Always wash hands or use hand sanitizer after touching or changing a used mask.
 - Keep a bag handy to store a used mask for laundering later.

- Remove the mask using the appropriate technique: do not touch the front of the mask but untie it from behind.

A study by the National Institutes of Health, CDC, UCLA and Princeton University scientists has highlighted that the COVID-19 virus was evident in aerosols for up to three hours, up to four hours on copper, up to 24 hours on cardboard and up to two to three days on plastic and stainless steel¹. However, cleaning with neutral detergent and followed by disinfectant can effectively inactivate the COVID-19 virus.

The risk of COVID-19 infection from handling cargo is considered low due to the relatively rapid deterioration of the virus on cargo that are shipped over a period of days or weeks. Currently there is no evidence to support COVID-19 transmission via imported goods. However, there is potential exposure for baggage or cargo handlers touching surfaces recently touched or handled by a person with COVID-19.

Key actions to take

Cargo companies should implement the following strategies to reduce risk of transmission.

- Ensure adequate supplies of hand sanitizer or soap and water are available for cleaning hands. Everyone should regularly clean hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash hands with soap and water and avoid the touching eyes, nose and mouth.
- Implement social distancing rules for the workplace.
- Increase frequency of cleaning and disinfecting work areas and restroom facilities including daily wipe-down of handrails, desks, lifts and other equipment and frequently touched surfaces.
- Limit access to the facility.
- Meet drivers and other non-essential visitors in an open, ventilated area (e.g. outdoors) as opposed to having them come into a room or office.
- Limit daily breaks and lunch to on-site locations so workers are not exposed to infections outside of the workplace.
- Consider staggered breaks for all employees.
- Limit interaction among employees during shift changes.
- Conduct regular team stand-up meetings in smaller groups of 10 or less, maintaining at least one metre distance between attendees.
- Inform staff of any changes to routine procedures for loading and unloading of cargo.
- If you must clean cargo materials for any reason, normal household detergent with activated bleach or 0.5% sodium hypochlorite solution will kill the virus.

References

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[\(covid-19\)-guidance-for-ship-operators-for-the-protection-of-the-health-of-seafarers.pdf?sfvrsn=6](#)).

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This document has been developed in accordance with global guidance and contextualized to the Pacific context by the Pacific Community and WHO from the COVID-19 Pacific Joint Incident Management Team.