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Circular Letter No.4204/Add.15  
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To: All IMO Member States  
United Nations and specialized agencies  
Intergovernmental organizations  
Non-governmental organizations in consultative status with IMO

Subject: **Coronavirus (COVID 19) - Personal protective equipment**

## Introduction

1 This circular letter provides World Health Organization (WHO) information and guidance on the safe and effective use of personal protective equipment (PPE) to support decisions on use of PPE to minimize the risks of COVID-19 infection for seafarers, marine personnel, fishing vessel personnel, passengers and others on board ships, as well as shore personnel intending to go on board (such as pilots, port workers, port State control officers, ship's agents, etc.); and in their interaction with each other. References to additional information from other relevant sources are included.

2 According to the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended (MLC, 2006), regulation 4.1, paragraph 1, flag States must ensure that all seafarers on ships that fly their flag are covered by adequate measures for the protection of their health and that they have access to prompt and adequate medical care whilst working on board.\* Furthermore, regulation 4.3, paragraph 1, provides that States shall ensure that seafarers on ships that fly their flag are provided with occupational health protection and live, work and train on board ship in a safe and hygienic environment. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, protection of seafarers would include the provision of alcohol-based hand rub and personal protection equipment, and the adoption of the necessary precautionary measures to prevent transmission of the virus during the interaction with people boarding ships for operational, inspection and other purposes.

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\* Reference is made to the Information note on maritime labour issues and coronavirus (COVID-19), available at [https://www.ilo.org/global/standards/maritime-labour-convention/WCMS\\_741024/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/standards/maritime-labour-convention/WCMS_741024/lang--en/index.htm)

## Use of personal protective equipment

3 COVID-19 spreads primarily from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth, which are expelled when a person with COVID-19 coughs, sneezes or speaks. People can catch COVID-19 if they breathe in these droplets from a person infected with the virus; these droplets can land on objects and surfaces around the person such as tables, doorknobs and handrails, and other people can become infected by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

4 Based on scientific evidence, WHO recommends to keep at least one metre away from others, washing hands regularly with soap and water or clean with alcohol-based hand rub, and practice respiratory hygiene. WHO experts agree that a risk-based approach to decision-making should be adopted on the use of PPE and masks by following advice outlined in WHO's:

.1 **Advice on the use of masks in the context of COVID-19**, in particular in the following sections:

.1 *Advice to decision makers on the use of masks for healthy people;* and

.2 *Mask management*, in particular for appropriate use and disposal of masks.

Related graphics and videos prepared by WHO can be downloaded in the following link: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks>; and

.2 **Rational use of personal protective equipment for coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and considerations during severe shortages** for PPE, e.g. gloves.

## Guidance available

5 PPE recommendations by WHO in the context of COVID-19 are available as follows:

.1 advice on the use of masks in the context of COVID-19:  
[https://www.who.int/publications-detail/advice-on-the-use-of-masks-in-the-community-during-home-care-and-in-healthcare-settings-in-the-context-of-the-novel-coronavirus-\(2019-ncov\)-outbreak](https://www.who.int/publications-detail/advice-on-the-use-of-masks-in-the-community-during-home-care-and-in-healthcare-settings-in-the-context-of-the-novel-coronavirus-(2019-ncov)-outbreak);

.2 rational use of personal protective equipment for coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and considerations during severe shortages:  
[https://www.who.int/publications-detail/rational-use-of-personal-protective-equipment-for-coronavirus-disease-\(covid-19\)-and-considerations-during-severe-shortages](https://www.who.int/publications-detail/rational-use-of-personal-protective-equipment-for-coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)-and-considerations-during-severe-shortages);

.3 operational considerations for managing COVID-19 cases or outbreaks on board ships:  
<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331591/WHO-2019-nCoV-Ships-2020.2-eng.pdf>; and

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- .4 interactive online course for managing COVID-19 cases or outbreaks on board ships:  
<https://extranet.who.int/hslp/training/course/view.php?id=326>.

6 General information and related guidance on the use of PPE in the context of COVID-19 in the maritime sector can also be found at:

- .1 ICS Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance for Ship Operators for the Protection of the Health of Seafarers (IMO Circular Letter No.4204/Add.4)  
(<http://www.ics-shipping.org/free-resources/covid-19>);
- .2 ICS Coronavirus (COVID-19) Related guidelines for ensuring a safe shipboard interface between ship and shore-based personnel (IMO Circular Letter No.4204/Add.16)  
(<http://www.ics-shipping.org/free-resources/covid-19>);
- .3 INTERTANKO Outbreak Management Plan COVID-19  
[http://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/HotTopics/Documents/INTERTANKO%202020-Covid%20management%20plan\\_3\\_lo.pdf](http://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/HotTopics/Documents/INTERTANKO%202020-Covid%20management%20plan_3_lo.pdf));
- .4 IAPH World Ports COVID-19 Information Portal  
(<https://sustainableworldports.org/world-ports-covid19-information-portal/>);
- .5 European Commission - Guidelines on protection of health, repatriation and travel arrangements for seafarers, passengers and other persons on board ships (IMO Circular Letter No.4204/Add.11)  
(<https://ec.europa.eu/transport/sites/transport/files/legislation/c20203100.pdf>);
- .6 Viña del Mar Agreement - Provisional Guidance to face the effects of the outbreak of COVID-19 with regard to the relevant IMO Conventions and the Maritime Labour Convention of the ILO (General aspects) (IMO Circular Letter No.4204/Add.8, annex 2); and
- .7 United States Coast Guard - General guidance following the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention CDC on Interim Guidance for Ships on Managing Suspected Coronavirus Disease 2019  
(<https://www.cdc.gov/quarantine/maritime/recommendations-for-ships.html>)

7 Member States and international organizations are invited to bring the contents of this circular letter to the attention of the competent authorities and all interested parties concerned, at regional, national and local levels, which are encouraged to include guidance on the use of PPE in their procedures for the boarding of ships for operational, inspection or other purposes.