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Circular Letter No.4204  
31 January 2020

To: All IMO Member States  
Intergovernmental organizations  
Non-governmental organizations in consultative status with IMO

Subject: **Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV)**

### Introduction

1 The purpose of this circular is to provide information and guidance, based on recommendations developed by the World Health Organization (WHO), on the precautions to be taken to minimize risks to seafarers, passengers and others on board ships from novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV).\*

### Background

2 On 31 December 2019, WHO was alerted to several cases of pneumonia in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China. Subsequently, on 7 January 2020, Chinese authorities confirmed that they had identified a new virus in the coronavirus family of viruses, which includes the common cold and viruses such as SARS and MERS. This new virus was temporarily named "2019-nCoV".

3 WHO has been working with the Chinese authorities, governments and global experts to rapidly expand scientific knowledge on the new virus, track its spread and virulence, and provide advice on measures to protect health and prevent the spread of this outbreak.

4 As of 29 January 2020, a total of 130 tests have been concluded in the United Kingdom, all of which were confirmed negative. The latest information regarding the situation in the United Kingdom can be obtained at the following address:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-information-for-the-public>

5 On 30 January 2020, WHO declared that the outbreak of novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) constituted a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC).

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\* For information and guidance on precautions for delegates attending IMO meetings, please refer to Circular Letter No.4203.

## Symptoms

6 Common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death. Infection from humans to humans may occur during the incubation period (before persons show signs of sickness). Coronavirus can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with long-term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease.

## Risks

7 The current outbreak originated in Wuhan City, which is a major domestic and international transport hub. Given the large population movements and the observed human-to-human transmission, it is not unexpected that new confirmed cases will continue to appear in other areas and countries.

## WHO advice

8 It is prudent to remind populations and health workers of the basic principles to reduce the general risk of transmission of acute respiratory infections by following the below-mentioned key preventative measures:

- .1 avoiding close contact with people suffering from acute respiratory infections;
- .2 frequent handwashing, especially after direct contact with ill people or their environment;
- .3 avoiding unprotected contact with farm or wild animals;
- .4 people with symptoms of acute respiratory infection should practise cough etiquette (maintain distance, cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or clothing, and wash hands); and
- .5 within healthcare facilities, enhance standard infection prevention and control practices in hospitals, especially in emergency departments.

9 WHO does not recommend any specific health measures for travellers. In case of symptoms suggestive of acute respiratory illness either during or after travel, travellers are encouraged to seek medical attention and share their travel history with their healthcare provider. Health authorities should work with travel, transport and tourism sectors to provide travellers with information to reduce the general risk of acute respiratory infections via travel health clinics, travel agencies, conveyance operators and at points of entry.

10 Travellers who had contact with confirmed cases or direct exposure to a potential source of infection should be placed under medical observation. High-risk contacts should avoid travel for the duration of the incubation period (up to 14 days).

11 Novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) advice for the public published on the WHO website contains WHO standard recommendations for the general public to reduce exposure to and transmission of a range of illnesses, to protect yourself and others from getting sick, and to stay healthy while travelling. WHO provides novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) travel advice here:

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/travel-advice>

12 With the information currently available for the novel coronavirus, WHO advises that measures to limit the risk of exportation or importation of the disease should be implemented, without unnecessary restrictions on international traffic.

13 Member States are advised to urge all stakeholders (companies, managers, crewing agents, etc.) to promulgate information to ensure that seafarers, passengers and others on board ships are provided with accurate and relevant information on the coronavirus outbreak and on the measures to reduce the risk of exposure if they are likely to be engaged on ships trading to and from ports in coronavirus-affected States.

#### **Guidance available**

14 The following links provide advice and guidance to seafarers and shipping (non-exhaustive list):

[International Maritime Health Association](#) (IMHA) advice for shipping companies on the new type of coronavirus (2019-nCoV)

[USCG Novel Coronavirus Precautions](#)

15 WHO issues advice on international travel and health. This information is regularly reviewed and updated by WHO and can be found at the following address:

[www.who.int/ith/updates](http://www.who.int/ith/updates)

Additional information can also be found at:

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/01/1056031>

[https://www.who.int/ith/other\\_health\\_risks/en/](https://www.who.int/ith/other_health_risks/en/)

16 The publications listed below may also be helpful:

WHO International Health Regulations

WHO Guide to ship sanitation

International Medical Guide for Ships

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