

COVID-19 ISSUES FOR SEAFARERS



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Shipping has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. As we are trading between the Persian Gulf and China, we faced many difficulties in crew changes, especially Indian nationals. Limitation on crew changes and quarantining has the potential to cause serious disruption to the flow of the trade. It is a challenge for the onboard crew and the shore management to provide smooth disembarkation and safe operation to the off-signers as well as the on-signers. Other seafarers are in lockdown at their homes and unable to work, threatening the family's financial income if they are the sole income earner, which is often the case.

This pandemic has cast a multitude of challenges on seafarers. Those sailing are facing prolonged contracts on board, mental stress from sailing to various ports where there is a high risk of contracting the virus, and isolation onboard. The global travel restrictions and lack of commercial flights have impacted crew changes and totally stopped shore leave. Unable to disembark, many seafarers become more liable to psychological illnesses such as depression. Worries about their loved ones at home coupled with a lack of proper rest may also result in fatigue, compromising the operational effectiveness of the vessel.

Many crew members have lost their loved ones and even missed their funerals as they find themselves on board for longer periods of time due to pandemic restrictions. Ship management supports crew members to the best of their abilities, offering relief measures such as financial and psychological support as well as free internet and health campaigns to reduce stress and improve mental wellbeing. Onboard management tries their best to make all crewmember happy and motivated by all available means, including creating games, organizing parties or encouraging physical exercise, among other activities.

Port operations have also changed. Now, we must discharge cargo without any shore personal on board; Chinese ports have implemented different measures to protect crews on board and reduce COVID-19 transmission risk. Most communication between ship and shore is carried out via email, mobile phone, and other means.

It was something new in the tanker business that no surveyor came on board for cargo calculation; cargo measurements were taken by crew members and videos were sent as evidence.

While the procedures have changed and are being carried out remotely, there are no issues and the vessel can operate efficiently. Onboard and onshore personnel have quickly adapted to carry out daily operations. The only issue left is the unvaccinated crew. On our vessel, not a single crew member was vaccinated despite our numerous requests. All that is left is to hope things will be all right and normal seaman life will be back soon.



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