



COVID-19 Best Practices for the Houston Ship Channel Area

To request changes or updates to this document:

- Email lshsc@txgulf.org. Reference the version number found in the bottom right corner.

How to spot COVID-19?

- The following symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure.
 - Fever, cough, shortness of breath
- The following emergency warning signs for COVID-19 require medical attention immediately. Emergency warning signs include:
 - Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath; Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
 - New confusion or inability to arouse; Bluish lips or face
- More information can be found on the CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>

How are government and public agencies ensuring your safety?

- These guidelines are not a guarantee. Actions or precautions will be taken on a case-by-case basis.
- There are multiple layers of inspection and assessment. USCG Sector Houston-Galveston, Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and local public health agencies are all working together to address the pandemic.
- However, most of the screening regarding maritime safety addresses vessels inbound from foreign ports or with foreign crews. Everyone – including terminals and service personnel – has a personal responsibility to limit transmission vectors.
- Coast Guard and CBP screen crews, last port of call, and the travel origin of crew members that boarded during transit.
- If crew members have visited Level 3 restricted countries within the 14 days preceding arrival to the port, that vessel may be detained offshore for quarantine. Keep in mind that many transits last longer than 14 days, so a vessel may have essentially been under self-quarantine before its arrival.
- Ships entering a US port are required to disclose any death or illness among passengers or crew to the CDC. Quarantinable diseases like COVID-19 are included.
- CBP agents have the discretion to detain crew on board.
- Ships must submit notice of arrival 96 hours before arriving to port to Coast Guard and must disclose if any crew members are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and have either traveled to a country on the CDC's Level 3 precaution list within 14 days of the onset of symptoms or have had close contact with a person under investigation for COVID-19 while that person was ill.
- If Coast Guard receives the notice of possible COVID-19 cases, they will reach out to the Houston CDC Quarantine Station for the next steps. This will be handled case-by-case, but it could include

COVID-19 Best Practices for the Houston Ship Channel Area

quarantining the vessel offshore, making arrangements to remove the ill crewmember while the vessel is offshore, or allowing the vessel to come into dock and removing the ill crew member by ground transportation.

- Coast Guard will also notify CBP, which will take appropriate actions on a case-by-case basis, with consideration for the probability of additional exposure to contagions. This could include detaining the crew on board or denying the lading/unlading permit.
- Coast Guard will notify the agent if there is a COTP order, and will specifically note if it is for COVID-19. The agent is expected to communicate this information to the terminal and other relevant parties.
- If a crew member is having symptoms of COVID-19 but it has not been reported, inform CDC and Sector Houston-Galveston immediately. If the vessel is at dock and it is not isolated, then isolate it (i.e., pull up the gangway).
- The criticality of the cargo may be considering when taking any action on a ship with an ill crew member.
- The Presidential Proclamation regarding travel bans excludes foreign nationals traveling as a crew member.
- Crew arriving via air to join a ship must enter through one of the 13 designated airports. Such crewmembers may or may not undergo health screening by CBP upon arrival.
- As always, our public agency partners will work to enable the flow of commerce as much as possible while still protecting the safety of our ports and citizens.

For everyone - Take practical steps to ensure your safety and the safety of others:

- Every individual has **personal responsibility** to maintain a high standard of hygiene and must insist that other individuals they are interacting with likewise follow high standards.
- Remember: There is the threat of transmission from the ship to shore, from shore to ship, and from shore to shore.
- COVID-19 can remain active on surfaces, clothing, etc. for several days.
- Follow Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations on personal hygiene. This includes:
 - Wash hands with soap for at least 20 seconds
 - If hand washing is not available, use 70% or greater alcohol-based hand sanitizer – rub thoroughly over hands until dry (about 20 seconds). Note: hand sanitizer is only effective if your hands are not visibly soiled/dirty.
 - Avoid touching your face. Wash hands immediately after touching your face.
 - Cough or sneeze into a disposable tissue or into your sleeve – never your hands.
- Practice social distancing of 6 feet (2 meters) but no less than 3 feet (1 meter) between individuals. Do not engage in handshakes or other physical forms of greeting.
- Avoid high-touch surfaces, such as door handles, elevator buttons, sink faucets, etc. Use your elbow or foot if possible. If you must use your hand, use a disposable paper towel or tissue and sanitize your hands immediately after.
- Frequently sanitize hands, shared workspaces, equipment, etc.
- Do not share equipment without sanitizing – this includes pens, digital touchpads, keyboards, phones/radios, handrails, door handles, etc.
- If you are ill or starting to feel ill, notify your supervisor and stay at home.

COVID-19 Best Practices for the Houston Ship Channel Area

- If you are working with an individual who appears to be ill, stay at least 6 feet (2 meters) away from that person and notify your supervisor immediately.
- Limit interaction with other individuals, and limit in-person meetings to only essential personnel.
- Individuals should consider avoiding in-person meetings, particularly those with over 10 attendees.
- Conduct as many communications as possible via phone, email, passing documents through a window, etc. to avoid close interaction.
- When in-person meetings are required, hold these meetings in open air if possible (such as on the dock rather than in enclosed ship spaces).
- Personal protection equipment (PPE) on the dock or ship is generally unnecessary unless there is indication of illness. However, some job roles or facilities will have more stringent protocols. Masks should be at least FFP2/N95 rated.
- Offices and facilities may consider implementing non-invasive temperature screening and a health questionnaire for employees and guests arriving onsite. Questions may include:
 - All countries and states the individual or household members have traveled to/from in the past 14 days, specifically regarding high-risk areas as determined by the CDC.
 - Any ongoing symptoms the individual is experiencing
 - Whether or not the individual has knowingly been in contact with a confirmed COVID-19 patient in the past 14 days

For those boarding ships:

- Confirm ships have followed USCG and CDC requirements for reporting death or illness of crew members and have followed guidance of all Marine Safety Information Bulletins (MSIBs).
- Request that ship crew members clean areas that shore personnel will visit or pass through with 5% bleach solution or 70% alcohol solution (but never bleach and alcohol together). This includes chart tables, instruments, chairs, helm, handrails, console, windows, etc.
- Do not board a vessel that has not been cleared by CBP or CDC.
- Only meet with essential personnel. Request ship's Master to dismiss any non-essential personnel from meeting areas or the wheelhouse.
- Minimize interaction with the ship crew.
- Avoid working in enclosed areas.
- Do not stay on board longer than necessary.
- If personnel expect to consume food or beverage while on the ship, it is recommended that they bring their own food, beverage, and containers/utensils onto the ship. If they are using the ship's containers/utensils, insist that the items have been thoroughly washed.
- Request that soap and water be made available for hand washing for the boarding personnel and anyone interacting with them.
- Personnel should bring disinfectant wipes or spray to clean any surfaces/equipment they will be touching.
- Personnel should bring hand sanitizer with them and use it at frequent intervals.

COVID-19 Best Practices for the Houston Ship Channel Area

- Personnel should have access to personal protection equipment (PPE) including nitrile gloves and FFP2/N95 or better rated masks to be used at their discretion or at the direction of supervisors.
- If disposable PPE is used, it must be donned prior to boarding the ship and disposed of after debarking the ship. Non-disposable PPE must be sanitized prior to using again.

For terminals and shore personnel:

- Confirm ships have followed USCG and CDC requirements for reporting death or illness of crew members and have followed guidance of all Marine Safety Information Bulletins (MSIBs).
- USCG will notify the agent if there is a suspected case of COVID-19 aboard a vessel. The agent is expected to notify the terminal.
- Pre-transfer conference or key meetings (such as for Declaration of Inspection) can be held by radio.
- If in person meetings are required, minimize participants to preferably to one ship representative and one operations shore participant.
- Hold pre-transfer conference on the gangway or dock in open air instead of on the vessels if weather/safety permit.
- Meeting areas, including tables, must be disinfected before and after use.
- Cargo surveyors, agents, technicians, regulatory agencies, etc., will be excluded from the pre-transfer conference but will still have ship access.
- Equipment usage should be performed by as few personnel as is safe, with attempts to maintain social distancing of at least 3 feet (1 meter).
- Personnel should bring disinfectant wipes or spray to clean any surfaces/equipment they will be touching.
- Personnel should bring hand sanitizer with them and use it at frequent intervals.
- Personnel should have access to personal protection equipment (PPE) including nitrile gloves and FFP2/N95 or better rated masks to be used at their discretion or at the direction of supervisors.
- Ship crew members may still have shore access; however, they must be authorized by CBP.
- If shore personnel observe a ship crew member showing symptoms of COVID-19, notify Sector Houston-Galveston and CBP. However, shore personnel cannot interfere with seafarer access.
- If a shore personnel is showing symptoms of COVID-19, isolate the individual immediately and require them to follow the CDC guidelines for individuals who are sick. Report any contact with that individual to the supervisor. The supervisor may need to refer the individual to the local public health entity. CDC guidelines: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html>.

For ships:

- Follow USCG and CDC requirements for reporting death or illness of crewmembers and follow guidance of all Marine Safety Bulletins (MSIBs).
- Prior to shore personnel boarding the vessel, clean areas shore personnel will visit or pass through with 5% bleach solution or 70% alcohol solution (but never bleach and alcohol together). This includes chart tables, instruments, chairs, helm, handrails, console, windows, etc.

COVID-19 Best Practices for the Houston Ship Channel Area

- Pre-transfer conference or key meetings (such as for Declaration of Inspection) can be held by radio.
- If in person meetings are required, minimize participants to preferably to one ship representative and one operations shore participant.
- Hold pre-transfer conference on the gangway or dock in open air instead of on the vessels if weather/safety permit.
- Cargo surveyors, agents, technicians, regulatory agencies, etc., will be excluded from the pre-transfer conference but will still have ship access.
- Ship crew can request that shore personnel don PPE and/or undergoing non-invasive temperature screening.
- Crew members may still have shore access; however, they must be authorized by CBP.
- If a crew member is showing symptoms of COVID-19, isolate the individual immediately following CDC guidelines and contact Sector-Houston Galveston Command Center. CDC Guidelines: <https://www.cdc.gov/quarantine/maritime/recommendations-for-ships.html>
- For towing vessel and barge operators, refer to American Water Operators Contingency Planning Guide: <https://www.americanwaterways.com/sites/default/files/AWO-COVID19-Contingency-Planning-Guide-March-13.pdf>

For crew transportation:

- Consider PPE when passengers are in the vehicle and when handling bags/parts.
- Attempt to space passengers
- Ventilate the vehicle regularly. If possible and weather/safety allows, roll the windows down while passengers are in the vehicle.
- Disinfect the vehicle interiors and exterior touchpoints (such as handles) at least twice per day; preferably before and after every change in passengers. Use 5% bleach solution or 70% alcohol solution.
- Log all passenger names.
- Do not allow passengers to stay in the vehicle unnecessarily.
- Keep hand sanitizer in the vehicle for the driver's and passengers' frequent use.
- If the driver observes a passenger who appears to be ill – especially if the individual is showing symptoms of COVID-19 – they should report it to their supervisor immediately for possible escalation to CDC.

Important contacts and more resources:

- Sector Houston-Galveston:
 - Command Center: 281-464-4855
- Customs & Border Protection (Houston Seaport office)
 - <https://www.cbp.gov/contact/ports/houston-seaport>
 - (713) 454-8002
- Centers for Disease Control
 - Houston Quarantine Station: 800-232-4636 or <https://www.cdc.gov/quarantine/stations/houston.html>

COVID-19 Best Practices for the Houston Ship Channel Area

- Guidance for Cargo Ships: How to Report Onboard Death or Illness to CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/quarantine/cargo/reporting-deaths-illness/how-to-report-onboard-death-or-illness.html>
- Interim Guidance for Ships on Managing Suspected Coronavirus Disease 2019: <https://www.cdc.gov/quarantine/maritime/recommendations-for-ships.html>
- Harris County Public Health
 - Harris County 2019 Novel Coronavirus: <http://publichealth.harriscountytexas.gov/Resources/2019-Novel-Coronavirus>
 - 832-927-7575
- Houston Public Health
 - COVID-19 Call Center: 832-393-4220
 - Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Updates: <https://houstonemergency.org/covid19>
- State of Texas Department of Health
 - dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus
 - coronavirus@dshs.texas.gov
 - Phone: 2-1-1, Option 6
 - Statewide Local Health Entities: <https://dshs.texas.gov/regions/2019-nCoV-Local-Health-Entities/>

Change History

Version/Date	User	Change
V 2020.03.17.a	Christine Schlenker	First edition distributed to LSHSC executive committee for review
V 2020.03.17.b	Christine Schlenker	Update CDC recommended group size
V 2020.03.18.a	Christine Schlenker	Update PPE recommendation for crew transport to consideration of using PPE