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Circular Letter No.4203  
31 January 2020

To: All IMO Member States  
United Nations and specialized agencies  
Intergovernmental organizations  
Non-governmental organizations in consultative status

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) and the Division of Healthcare Management and Occupational Safety and Health (DHMOHS), United Nations, on the precautions to be taken to minimize risks to delegates attending meetings at the International Maritime Organization (IMO) following the recent outbreak of 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, 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).

\* For information and guidance on precautions for seafarers, passengers and others on board ships, please refer to IMO Circular Letter No.4204.

## 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.

## Precautionary measures

8 The National Health Service (NHS) in the UK has advised that those who have returned from Wuhan in the last 14 days should stay indoors and avoid contact with other people, as one would with other flu viruses. They are further requested to call NHS 111 to inform it of their recent travel to the city.

9 Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are being installed at IMO premises.

10 With the information currently available on 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.

## Advice from the Division of Healthcare Management and Occupational Safety and Health (DHMOOSH), United Nations

11 It is prudent to remind populations and health workers of the basic principles to reduce the general risk of transmission of acute respiratory infections. DHMOOSH recommends the following **key preventive measures against novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV)**:

### 1 Take steps to prevent illness with respiratory pathogens:

- Avoid close contact with people suffering from acute respiratory infections such as with fever, cough and difficulty breathing.
- Perform frequent handwashing, especially after direct contact with ill people or their environment.
- Individuals with symptoms of acute respiratory infection should practise respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette including:
  - maintain your distance from others;
  - cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when coughing or sneezing;
  - use the nearest waste receptacle to dispose of the tissue after use;

- perform hand hygiene (e.g. handwashing with non-antimicrobial soap and water, alcohol-based hand rub, or antiseptic handwash) after having contact with respiratory secretions and contaminated objects/materials;
- Avoid close and unprotected contact with live or dead farm or wild animals;
- When visiting live markets in areas currently experiencing cases of novel coronavirus, avoid direct unprotected contact with live animals and surfaces in contact with animals;
- The consumption of raw or undercooked animal products should be avoided. Raw meat, milk or animal organs should be handled with care, to avoid cross-contamination with uncooked foods, as per good food safety practices;
- Preliminary information suggests that older adults and people with underlying health conditions may be at increased risk of severe disease from this virus.

## 2 Pay attention to your health during your travel to outbreak locations and after you leave.

- **Seek medical care immediately** if you begin to develop fever or respiratory symptoms such as shortness of breath or cough. Remember to share your previous travel history with your healthcare provider.
- You should make every effort to inform the medical clinic by telephone about your condition prior to presenting in person there.

## 3 Keep up to date with local health advice before and during your travel

For all travellers, while WHO advises against the application of any travel or trade restrictions on countries with novel coronavirus, please be aware that **local authorities may begin to implement travel restrictions and health screening measures for travellers entering or exiting the country**. All personnel should check with the destination country's embassy, consulate or ministry of health and keep up to date with local health advice before and during your travel. You should also comply with any screening measures put in place by local authorities.

12 Should you feel unwell while on IMO premises, you may contact the Health and Well-being Services on the 5th floor, rear wing (ext. 4012) for any immediate assistance you may require.

### Guidance available

13 DHMOSH provides regular updates on its website:

<https://hr.un.org/page/travel-health-information>

14 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/)

15 The publications listed below may also be helpful:

WHO International Health Regulations  
WHO Guide to ship sanitation

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