

Vaccinating Seafarers

The shipping industry¹ is once again collaborating to ensure that seafarers are protected against the COVID-19 disease. A Vaccinations Task Force is developing best practice guidance in order to:

- Ensure a pragmatic approach is taken by Governments to seafarer inoculations;
- Develop guidelines setting out all the steps necessary to implement a vaccination programme for seafarers; and
- Address the legal liabilities for shipowners arising from vaccinations.

The principles adopted recognise that:

1. Seafarers have been recognised by UN bodies as ‘key workers’ and, as such, countries should vaccinate seafarers at the earliest possible opportunity;
2. Seafarers should be encouraged to be vaccinated when offered the opportunity;
3. Only vaccines on the WHO’s Emergency Use List (EUL) should be used; and
4. Vaccinated seafarers should be provided with internationally accepted documentation containing standard information that can be used to verify the vaccination.

The shipping industry has worked with the relevant UN bodies and made representations to the COVAX scheme², particularly since most seafarers come from countries eligible for vaccines through that scheme. Similarly the shipping industry have approached the pharmaceutical industry for access to vaccines for seafarers.

Multiple UN agencies including the WHO and IMO have confirmed that currently vaccines are not available for purchase by a private entity unless a State agency is directly involved. It is noted that some public private partnerships have been established notably in the Philippines, however, these are also run by State agencies.

Many ship owners and managers have reported that they have been approached by private entities offering to provide vaccines to seafarers. The industry group would caution against the use of privately obtained vaccines as their legitimacy and efficacy may be questionable.

The shipping industry group remains committed to ensuring that seafarers are properly vaccinated using WHO EUL approved vaccines provided by appropriate State agencies. It is hoped that private vaccinations will be available in most countries soon. Industry organisations will continue to lobby for the vaccination of seafarers at the earliest point.

¹ This note has been developed by **ICS, BIMCO, CLIA, ECSA, ICMA, IMCA, IMEC, IMHA, INTERCARGO, InterManager, INTERTANKO, ISOA, ITF and WSC.**

² COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access, abbreviated as COVAX, is a global initiative aimed at equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines led by UNICEF, Gavi, WHO, CEPI, and others. For further information see: <https://www.who.int/initiatives/act-accelerator/covax>