

Guidelines for the handling of Covid-19 on vessels manned and operated by IMR

The purpose of these guidelines is to give practical guidance for establishing efficient barriers to prevent the Covid-19 from entering vessels manned and operated by IMR, and to prevent the spreading of Covid-19 if the virus is present on board.

Cruise leaders assess the standing risk assessment (Risk assessment Covid-19 on board research vessels <https://www.hi.no/en/hi/cruises-and-field-work/imrs-research-vessels-department/covid-19-related-information-cruise-and-vessel>) whether it is adequate for their impending cruise, or a specific assessment must be prepared. For cruises planned far from the coast more than 24 hours from rescue service within 10 days from start, and for cruises with frequent changes of personnel, for example student cruises, each cruise leader must develop a separate Covid-19 Risk assessment and a Risk management plan to be discussed in due time with the Captain, but not later than one day before the cruise.

1. General

It is important to follow the guidelines from the Norwegian Institute of Public Health (NIPH) for how to avoid spreading the virus, such as social distancing (1 m distance to other people), cough and sneeze in your elbow, wash your hands often and wear a face mask when it is impossible to maintain the 1 m distance to other people.

Participants on cruises can impose stricter measures on themselves or their own organization than what is described below, but the guidelines described here are the rules for the vessels crews.

2. Ways to prevent the Covid-19 virus to enter the vessels

- a) We encourage everyone to carry out vaccination continuously based on notices.
- b) It is first and foremost important that all cruise participants embarking the vessel are Covid-19 free. If you feel sick before a cruise, it is very important to inform your employer representative and to stay home!
We ask everyone who are going on a cruise with IMR manned and operated vessels, to stick to the following guidelines and NIPH's measures to avoid infection by Coronavirus.
- c) Anyone entering the vessels must fill in the current IMR «Coronavirus (COVID-19) Self Assessment” form and deliver it to the Captain of the vessel before embarkation. See <https://www.hi.no/en/hi/cruises-and-field-work/imrs-research-vessels-department/covid-19-related-information-cruise-and-vessel>
- d) There is no requirement for Covid-19 testing before embarkation if you do not have any Covid-19 symptoms. The exception would be if it is decided for cruises where special measures must be taken. These measures will be informed by the cruise leader/Vessel department in advance.
- e) Personnel from abroad
For crew or cruise participants joining an IMR vessel after travelling from another country may be handled differently with regards to Covid-19 preventive measures depending on which country they have travelled from, depending on which Norwegian public Covid-19 regulations that are in force at the time, even if the vessel is in a port outside Norway.

Both Norwegian and local regulations will be applied if they are not exactly the same. The Cruise leader must check the procedure for each individual with regards to requirements for testing in the country of departure, testing in the country of arrival, quarantine requirements in the port of departure etc., and make sure that each individual is given the necessary information in due time in order to be able to join the vessel on a planned date since it can take up to one week before the final result(s) of Covid-19 test(s) are available. <https://www.NIPH.no/en/id/infectious-diseases/coronavirus/>

f) Svalbard

For personnel travelling to Norway and further on to Longyearbyen on Svalbard to embark a vessel, cruise leader or HR manager at the Vessel Department will check for eventual restrictions. Updated information can be found on <https://en.visitsvalbard.com/visitor-information/visit-svalbard-refrain-from-travelling-covid-19>

g) Shipyards

When an IMR vessel is planned to go to a shipyard, the Captain shall ask for the shipyard internal Covid-19 procedures and preventive measures in time for the crew to harmonize the local shipyard procedures with the vessel's own, before arriving at the yard.

It is important to minimize human contact between crew and yard staff, e.g by establishing a modified access control system at the gangway. Both external personnel and IMR staff working on board a vessel at a shipyard, must follow the same Covid-19 procedures as the crew and fill in the «Coronavirus COVID-19 Self Assessment – YARD STAY, MAINTENACE STOP». This assessment should be delivered to the Captain of the vessel before embarkation.

h) In the context of infection control, persons living on board are to be regarded as belonging to the same family. Visits to others outside the "family on board" must be considered according to the rules and advice given by NIPH at any given time. It is encouraged to avoid visiting others (such as friends and own family) when on board, unless NIPHS advice for infection control can be fully complied in respect to meet other people.

3. When embarked

- a) The cruise leader shall review with the Captain of the vessel the risk assessment and infection control plan, well in advance of the cruise. Focus on extra measures has to be taken where a cruise-specific risk assessment and infection control plan have been made.
- b) Handling of goods and luggage
It is recommended to wear gloves for handling goods and luggage from the pier on board the vessel.
- c) To ensure that everyone has the same understanding and are in agreement on how all on board shall behave with regards to avoid the potential spreading of the Covid-19 virus it is recommended to arrange a "Covid-19 meeting" at the first possible opportunity after crew- and/or cruise personnel change where all general and in-force preventive recommendations, measures and procedures are presented and discussed, and any new particular measures for the individual cruise are presented and agreed.
- d) Cooperation and social interactions during the first 10 days of a cruise
Those who are working together in a team on board, e.g. on the same watch team in a lab, the catering staff, the engine room staff or the deck hands, can work together as normal as long as the "ground rules" for Covid-19 prevention such as keep social distance (more than 1 meter) at all times, use face mask if necessary, keep the hands clean etc. Such work teams should share a table during meals and not mix with other teams. Persons in the same work



team can also socialize when off duty. All surfaces that needs to be touched to be disinfected afterwards.

e) Unnecessary visits and activities

It is not allowed to make unnecessary trips / activities during the working period on board, if you have not been fully vaccinated or protected.

f) Service personnel

For service personnel visiting the vessel in port it is important that they do not get access to other parts of the vessel than what is strictly necessary. If infection control can be taken care of, they can be served with the vessel management's acceptance.

They shall not be handed temporary access pass, Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) or any other items belonging to the vessel.

g) Port calls abroad

The Captain to discuss with the Vessel Department when calling on foreign ports.

h) Sharing cabins

Vaccinated can share cabins. If the cruise lasts within 24 hours of rescue service, it is sufficient that you are protected (3 weeks or more after received the first dose), but if the cruise goes further at sea, those who share a cabin must be fully vaccinated (1 week or more after received the final dose).

i) Access to cabins

To reduce the risk of infection, no other than the cabin occupant shall enter a cabin during the first 10 days of a cruise, except when Barrier Tech Fogger is used for disinfection of surfaces by the crew.

j) Access to common rooms

Common rooms on board such as corridors, staircases lounges, library, mess room, gym, bridge, acoustic center etc. to be disinfected with Barrier Tech Fogger iaw "Procedure for use of Barrier Tech Fogger for disinfection of surfaces" in the morning and in the afternoon, in addition to the usual cleaning iaw the vessel's internal daily routines.

Use of the gym to be based on the Risk assessment for use of gym on board during Covid-19 pandemic.

Access to the bridge for the first 10 days of the cruise to be limited to cruise leader and instrument technicians when necessary. Access for others to be agreed with the Captain.

k) Meals

The number of seats in the mess room shall be arranged such that social distancing as directed is kept at all times adjusted during the first 10 days of the cruise, e.g. by removing every other chair around the dining tables to reduce the capacity and that only those in the same work team eats at the same table at the same time, and if necessary allocate different meal times to the work teams.

Handwashing with soap and water, or disinfection gel/spray, before meals is mandatory.

All surfaces that needs to be touched to be disinfected frequently by the catering personnel.

4. Measures to be taken if Covid-19 infection is suspected

The following measures are recommended if Covid-19 infection is suspected:

- Immediately isolate the infected person(s) and others in the same cohort in single cabin(s). It is not recommended to use the vessel's hospital as an isolation unit. If shared cabins are necessary to execute a cruise, one or more cabins should be kept empty to be used as "quarantine" and a plan for how to accommodate persons evacuated from their cabins to be used as "quarantine" cabins, e.g by bringing extra mattresses and accommodate non-infected persons in labs, lounges or other rooms on board.
- Persons with Covid-19 symptoms to be tested during next port call, and both those with symptoms, others in the same cohort and any one else who have been in contact with those infected should be taken ashore and followed up by local health services.
- Inform IMR/Research Vessel Department that a Covid-19 outbreak is suspected.
- If it is decided to send one or more persons ashore:
 - Contact Radio Medico for advice and guidance.
 - Contact VTS Vardø to get allocated port of entry.
 - Inform the local harbor master in port of entry.
 - Contact local health authorities to agree on time and place for Covid-19 testing and if necessary, follow up medical treatment.

5. Measures to reduce the consequences of a Covid-19 outbreak

Handling of Covid-19 infection on board

The Captain must ensure that there is sufficient amounts of PPE and related consumables on board at any time.

Those who are in close contact with a Covid-19 patient must use the required PPE, such as a head visor or goggles, face mask, protection suit and gloves. It is important to take on and off all PPE in a correct manner to avoid infection.

6. Other

a) Sick leave and compensation for time spent in quarantine

Rules for sick leave and compensation can vary between employers. For IMR staff it is different for land-based personnel and maritime crew.

For land-based staff: Check Hinnsiden.

For maritime crew:

Seafarers who are set in quarantine outside their home before going on board, e.g. in a hotel, will be compensated with 2/30 days salary pr day. If quarantined the end of a work period on board, e.g. when travelling back to country of residence, no compensation will be given.

Seafarers who sets themselves in quarantine based on own state of health (Covid-19 symptoms) does not need a health declaration from medical personnel if not able to report for duty on board.

b) Personnel who are in a Covid-19 high-risk group as defined by the Norwegian Institute of Public Health:

Covid-19 high risk personnel should consult with their local GP or a seafarer's doctor if it is advisable to go on a cruise.

Get a sick leave statement if deemed necessary. Travel restrictions to be informed to the Captain, the IMR Crew manager, and/or the Cruise leader immediately.

Immunosuppressive drugs lower the effect of Covid-19 vaccine. It is therefore important that those to whom this applies, inform the Captain or HR manager at the Vessel Department of all health conditions.

7. Way ahead

a) Vaccination

As of today, it is uncertain when everyone who wish to be vaccinated will receive the vaccine.

It not decided yet if personnel who refuse to be vaccinated against Covid-19, or are unable to be vaccinated for medical reasons, can be allowed on board as crew, instrument technician or cruise participant, including travelling to/from the vessel in a foreign country.

It may be considered necessary to reallocate personnel who have not been fully vaccinated or protected for certain vessels/cruises.

If any questions, contact:

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Cross references

External references

Risk Assessment COVID-19 Research Vessels <https://www.hi.no/en/hi/cruises-and-field-work/imrs-research-vessels-department/covid-19-related-information-cruise-and-vessel>

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Self Assessment <https://www.hi.no/en/hi/cruises-and-field-work/imrs-research-vessels-department/covid-19-related-information-cruise-and-vessel>

Norwegian Institute of Public Health <https://www.NIPH.no/en/>