

Briefing note for UK ports on the Wuhan Coronavirus

Public Health England, Public Health Wales, Health Protection Scotland, the NI Public Health Agency and the Department for Transport are yet to provide some specific ports/shipping advice on the Wuhan Coronavirus so we have prepared the following briefing note for members which we hope will be of assistance.

Recent developments

Today we have published a short [paper](#) written by the law firm **Hill Dickinson** which outlines the impact of the Wuhan Coronavirus on the ports sector. This paper is a prelude for their forthcoming BPA Port Futures paper on pandemics.

On 11 February Public Health England published general [guidance](#) for **port staff** which contains quite generic information, including what to do if a traveller becomes unwell at a port.

On 10 February the Health Secretary [announced](#) **strengthened legal powers** to bolster public health protections against the Wuhan Coronavirus. A new [Regulation](#) has been put in place with immediate effect to impose restrictions on any individual considered by health professionals to be at risk of spreading the virus. The announcement is not a result of a change in risk to the UK public, which remains moderate.

On 6 February the **Australian Government** published an information sheet for the [marine industry](#) and [marine pilots](#) which includes guidance on how to deal with those vessels, passengers or crew which have left or transited through mainland China on or after 1 February.

On 3 February Public Health England published [guidance](#) to assist professionals in advising the general public. The Department for Transport has advised that organisations are expected to use this guidance to put in place their own operational plans if they think these are relevant.

On 30 January the World Health Organization declared that the outbreak of Wuhan Coronavirus constituted a **Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC)**.

On 26 January the **International Maritime Health Association** has provided [advice](#) to **shipping crew** and **companies**, which includes:

- Do not restrict embarkation / disembarkation of seafarers in non-affected ports
- Do not restrict necessary ship visits by port agents, chaplains, service personnel and others

- If a person on board falls sick and has been travelling to affected areas 2-12 days before embarkation, the person must stay in his cabin and a medical doctor consulted in the next port
- If a sick person is on board of the ship, fill in the Maritime Declaration of Health and notify port authority

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). The Wuhan 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.

Preventative measures

The **basic** preventative measures to reduce the general risk of transmission of acute respiratory infections, such as the Wuhan Coronavirus, are:

- Avoiding close contact with people suffering from acute respiratory infections
- Frequent handwashing, especially after direct contact with ill people or their environment
- Avoiding unprotected contact with farm or wild animals
- People with symptoms of acute respiratory infection should practise cough etiquette (maintain distance, cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or clothing and wash hands)

Travel advice

Since 31 January, British nationals have been evacuated from the high risk areas of China and some flights have been postponed but in one form or another travel and shipping continues. The Port of Wuhan is not a coastal, deep sea port and only facilitates modest levels of trade however there have been outbound passenger and crew screening at the larger Chinese ports.

The Chinese authorities have put in place **travel restrictions** in the affected areas in China. Health measures such as fever measurements are installed at Chinese airports, bus and train stations and at ports. There have been some [disruptions](#) at Chinese ports as a lack of stevedores and truck drivers has been slowing down vessel turnaround times.

Regulatory control measures

The World Health Organization's [International Health Regulations 2005](#) (IHR) were introduced to 'prevent, protect against, control and provide' a public health response to the international spread of disease in ways which are commensurate with and restricted to public health risks, and which avoid unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade. The UK is a State Party to the WHO so was obliged to implement.

These have been implemented by:

[The Public Health \(Ships\) Regulations 1979](#)

[The Public Health \(Ships\) \(Amendment\) \(England\) Regulations 2007](#)

[The Public Health \(Ships\) \(Scotland\) Amendment Regulations 2007](#)

[The Public Health \(Ships\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2008](#)

[The Public Health \(Ships\) \(Amendment\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2007](#)

These regulations give **port health authorities** powers to:

- Inspect a ship on arrival
- Require a ship to be moored or anchored at a safe place for inspection, with the consent of the harbour master
- Examine any person on board and have them removed from the ship and isolated or sent to a hospital, or prohibit them from disembarking from the ship
- Instruct that no person shall board or leave a ship, without the permission of the port health authority

The regulations also require the **Master** to:

- Notify the relevant port health authority of any actual or suspected infection or contamination of their crew or passengers
- Where relevant, to submit a Maritime Declaration of Health

We understand however that the four UK Public Health bodies are under direction from the COBRA Committee so may issue an order that overrides these regulations.

It is worth noting that the port health authority does not have as many powers as the MCA or **SOSREP**. The Marine Safety Act 2003 states that the SOSREP may intervene by giving a direction if it is 'necessary to remove or reduce a risk' or to 'secure the safety of persons', so it appears that, depending on the circumstances, the SOSREP could be called upon in an emergency situation. The BPA will contact the SOSREP to gain further clarification on this.

As typical **sailing times** from China are 28-40 days the Department of Health and Social Care have said they expect crew to develop symptoms within this time if they have been infected with the Wuhan Coronavirus so they are focusing on aviation and ferry travel at this time. On cargo they suggest any potentially infected food stuffs will be risk assessed by local port health authorities.

International responses and measures taken

The **Port of Singapore** is denying permission to disembark to any crew members with passports from Hubei province and all seafarers leaving PSA terminals have to undergo temperature screening (and the possibility of quarantine in the event of a suspected case). Visitors who have been to China, Hong Kong or Macau within the past two weeks are being denied entry to the port.

Ports in **Australia** have also begun quarantining crew on ships coming from China on arrival. The **Australian Government** published an information sheet for the [marine industry](#) and [marine pilots](#) which includes guidance on how to deal with those vessels, passengers or crew which have left or transited through mainland China on or after 1 February.

Major **cruise lines** operating in Asia are banning tourists who have been in the city of Wuhan or come from Hebei Province in a bid to prevent an outbreak of the Wuhan Coronavirus at sea. Although less of interest in the UK some cruise lines with Asian itineraries have also taken the further step of temporarily suspending some or all of their port calls in China.

You may have seen in the news that the cruise ship **Diamond Princess** currently has 174 people on board, out of 3,700 passengers, who have been diagnosed with the virus. It is currently docked in Yokohama in Japan until the incubation period passes after the virus was detected in a former passenger who got off the ship last month in Hong Kong. Another case which may be of interest is the **MS Westerdam** carrying over 2,000 passengers. Although none of the passengers have been diagnosed with the virus, as it had docked in Hong Kong less than two weeks ago, which is within the incubation period of the virus, Thailand, Japan, the Philippines and Guan have all refused the cruise ship entry.

Next steps

We believe that some UK port health authorities have implemented enhanced screening measures such as requesting Maritime Declarations of Health from vessels that have called at Chinese ports, boarding and interviewing crew and disseminating travel advice. In the absence of central guidance to seaports, this approach would seem to meet the aims of providing active surveillance and early detection, whilst minimising interference with international travel and trade.

We suggest ports in the UK speak to their local port health authorities as they should be able to give you advice and suggest a plan of action. You may have seen in our recent [press release](#) we called for more funding and support to be given to port health authorities to devise their emergency plans in case the situation escalates. We understand from speaking to members that some port health authorities are under prepared and woefully under resourced, but would welcome any feedback you have on this so we can continue the feed back to Government. You may also wish to contact your Local Resilience Forum.

Further reading

It is worth following information issued by the Association of Port Health Authorities on their [website](#), [January newsletter](#), [Twitter](#).

The EU's Healthy Gateways have issued [interim advice](#) for the preparedness and response for port health authorities and ship operators.

Prepared by British Ports Association, 14 February 2020