



Three steps to contain an outbreak of infection onboard

An 'outbreak', in very simple terms is defined as prevalence of an infectious disease in a population. In the context of merchant ships, an outbreak is when multiple crew members are infected by the same infectious disease. In the confines of the onboard environment, infectious diseases can spread rapidly from one crew member to another.

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Containing an outbreak may seem challenging, but the key is early detection, as it allows the onboard and onshore management to implement control measures in a timely manner. This can be achieved in three simple steps all of which must be set out in one way or another in vessel's 'Outbreak Management Plan' (OMP):

- **Act early:**How 'early', would depend on when the infection is detected and reported to senior management onboard. Please refer to [our poster and accompanying alert](#) on early reporting by crew having symptoms of a viral infection. Once both the onboard and shore management is aware of the outbreak of infection, the shipboard OMP should be activated, and actions taken quickly. Getting the priorities right is important. To prevent exposure to other crew, it may be that isolation of infected crew members needs to be prioritised while waiting for guidance from medical experts. If that is the case, isolations will have to be managed with care as other crew will otherwise be hesitant to report their symptoms.

- **Follow the plan:**Broadly speaking, the OMP should cover the below mentioned five areas. It is important that crew members are familiar with the contents and requirements of the OMP for its quick and effective implementation.

- Managing infections and suspect cases onboard.
- Control measures to reduce exposure of uninfected crew. This will also include carrying and distribution of protective equipment.
- Handling ship-shore interactions.
- Reporting format to be used when contacting managers and port authorities.
- Testing and monitoring.

- **Monitor the situation:**Once all the measures as highlighted in the OMP have been taken to contain the infection, management should continuously monitor the progress made in recovery of any infected crew and to ensure that uninfected crew do not show any symptoms of the infection. Detailed medical logs as directed by a shore doctor will have to be maintained. As a minimum the treatment administered, and vitals of infected crew must be recorded.

External links

- [Outbreak Management Plan: Covid-19 \(Version 5\)](#) by INTERTANKO
- [Handbook for management of public health events on board ships](#) by WHO

Gard material

Loss Prevention poster: [outbreak-management_Lowres.pdf](#)

Loss Prevention poster: [Gard hand washing Lowres.pdf](#)

Loss Prevention poster: [Face Mask lowres.pdf](#)

Loss Prevention alert: [Be a handwash hero](#)

Loss Prevention alert: [Face masks are effective transmission barriers against infections](#)

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