



# SHIP SAFETY BULLETIN

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## Subject: Guidance for cruise operators to mitigate risks associated with COVID-19

This bulletin replaces Ship Safety Bulletin No. [22/2022](#)

### Purpose

This bulletin outlines **recommended** measures for Authorized Representatives of cruise ships operating in Canadian waters, and persons on board those vessels. While measures outlined in this bulletin are not requirements, Transport Canada suggests their adoption to mitigate the risks of COVID-19 transmission, and the severity of the disease, on board cruise ships.

This bulletin also outlines requirements for cruise vessels to report cases of communicable disease amongst passengers and crew upon entering Canada, pursuant to section 34 of the *Quarantine Act*, using the Maritime Declaration of Health.

### Scope

Due to the unique nature of cruise ships which see large groups of people congregating in communal areas, often for extended periods of time, it is recommended that Authorized Representatives of cruise ships follow the measures set out in this bulletin.

### Background

In March 2022, Transport Canada implemented a strict comprehensive public health framework, developed in collaboration with the Public Health Agency of Canada, to support the safe restart of the cruise season. This framework focused on COVID-19 related health requirements to ensure safe cruise activities in Canada.

#### Keywords:

1. Coronavirus
2. Passengers
3. Alternative Practices

#### Questions concerning this Bulletin should be addressed to:

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	Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0N8

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As Canada's COVID-19 situation has continued to evolve throughout the 2022 cruise season, and the cruise industry has demonstrated an ability to successfully manage COVID-19 cases on board cruise ships, Transport Canada has removed mandatory requirements for cruise ships operating in Canadian waters. To help maintain the safety of passengers and crew onboard cruise ships, it is **strongly recommended** that the industry continue to follow the **guidance** in Transport Canada's public health framework, outlined below.

It should be noted that all operations and guidance are subject to changing epidemiological conditions in Canada.

## **COVID-19 - Recommended Procedures**

### **COVID-19 Management Plan**

It is recommended that Authorized Representatives of cruise ships operating in Canadian waters implement COVID-19 Management Plans outlining measures to mitigate the risks of COVID-19 transmission onboard. It is recommended that COVID-19 Management Plans be vessel-specific and contain the following components:

- measures implemented in accordance with the vaccination and testing framework section below;
- measures to prevent or limit the spread of COVID-19 onboard a cruise ship;
- measures to protect crew members and passengers from the transmission of COVID-19 when the cruise ship stops at a port of call during the voyage; and
- measures to respond to a COVID-19 outbreak onboard a cruise ship.

For additional recommendations on measures to include as part of the COVID-19 management plan, Authorized Representatives can refer to this [Instructional Reference Tool](#).

## **Record Keeping**

### **Passengers and Crew**

It is recommended that Authorized Representatives of cruise ships operating in Canadian waters maintain records onboard that include the following information:

1. Company Name
2. Vessel IMO Number
3. Date of Record
4. Total number of passengers on board
5. Number of passengers fully vaccinated

6. Number of passengers with a positive COVID-19 test
7. Total number of crew on board
8. Number of fully vaccinated crew
9. Number of crew with a positive COVID-19 test

These records would provide valuable insight in case of a COVID-19 outbreak onboard the cruise ship.

### **Vaccination and Testing Framework**

#### **Vaccination**

Authorized Representatives are **strongly recommended** to verify that all persons over 6 months of age are **fully vaccinated** before boarding the vessel (i.e., at least 14 days after they complete a COVID-19 vaccine dosage regimen).

#### **Testing**

Authorized Representatives are **recommended** to ensure that all persons 5 years of age and over provide a **pre-embarkation test** prior to boarding the cruise ship.

#### **Pre-Embarkation Testing for Passengers**

It is recommended that Authorized Representatives ensure that persons seeking to board the cruise ship provide one of the following:

- Evidence of a negative COVID-19 molecular test (e.g. PCR test) – performed on a specimen collected from the person no more than 72 hours prior to their initial boarding of the cruise ship.
- Evidence of a negative COVID-19 antigen test (e.g. RAT) – performed on a specimen collected from the person no more than 2 days before initially boarding the cruise ship.
- Evidence of a positive result for a COVID-19 molecular test that was performed on a specimen collected from the person at least 10 days and no more than 180 days before the person initially boards the cruise ship.

It is also recommended that Authorized Representatives ensure that persons who are not fully vaccinated take a COVID-19 antigen test on the day they embark the vessel.

#### **Continued Testing**

As COVID-19 positivity rates are higher onboard cruise ships on longer voyages, it is **recommended** that Authorized Representatives establish regular testing intervals for crew on board these cruise ships. As such, it is recommended that crew on board cruise ships on voyages of 6 days or more be tested for COVID-19 every 3 days.

### **Additional Testing**

It is recommended that Authorized representatives implement the following additional testing measures:

- All persons onboard the ship, or intending to re-embark the ship, with signs and symptoms of COVID-19 (i.e. fever and a cough, or fever and difficulty breathing) take either a COVID-19 molecular test or a COVID-19 antigen test. It is also recommended that:
  - a person who is awaiting results for a COVID-19 test isolates while awaiting the result.
  - if the results of a COVID-19 test is negative, the person be released from COVID-19 isolation.
  - if the results of a COVID-19 test are positive, the person isolates in accordance with local public health guidelines.
- It is recommended that all COVID-19 tests be either performed or observed by a testing provider.

### **Close Contacts**

It is recommended that Authorized Representatives ensure that all persons who are a close contact of a positive COVID-19 case onboard the ship take a COVID-19 molecular or a COVID-19 antigen test 48 hours after contact with the positive case.

It is recommended that all COVID-19 tests be either performed or observed by a testing provider.

### **Isolation Measures**

It is recommended that Authorized Representatives follow isolation measures, as outlined in the [Instructional Reference Tool](#).

It is recommended that Authorized Representatives of cruise ships work with local public health authorities and port authorities to ensure the safe disembarkation of any COVID-19 positive individuals. It is also recommended that Authorized Representatives ensure that COVID-19 positive individuals are made aware of local public health measures upon their disembarkation from the cruise ship.

### **Public Health Agency of Canada Requirements on Reporting a Communicable Disease or a Gastrointestinal Illness**

#### **Communicable Diseases of Quarantine Concern**

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) requires that marine vessels report cases of communicable disease amongst passengers and crew pursuant to section 34 of the *Quarantine Act* using the [Maritime Declaration of Health \(MDH\)](#):

- As soon as possible before a conveyance arrives at its destination in Canada (recommended 24-48 hours prior to arrival); and
- As soon as possible before a conveyance departs from its last port in Canada.

Additionally, marine operators must call the PHAC Quarantine Central Notification System (CNS) if the Maritime Declaration of Health is submitted within 24 hours of arrival. Call 1-833-615-2384 (toll-free).

In addition to the Maritime Declaration of Health, the operator is required to complete either Annex A and/or Annex B.

- [Annex A](#) must currently be used for confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19 or as directed by PHAC. Instructions on changes to reporting requirements will be issued by the Government of Canada.
- [Annex B](#) must be completed if there are signs and symptoms of a communicable disease other than COVID-19 on board.

There may be situations where the operator will be required to submit both Annex A and B. For example, if one or more travellers on the same vessel tests positive for COVID-19, you must submit Annex A. If another traveller displays signs and symptoms of a communicable disease listed in the syndromal case definition, but doesn't test positive for COVID-19, the operator is required to submit Annex B.

If you need to request a copy of the forms, please contact PHAC at [cns-snc@phac-aspc.gc.ca](mailto:cns-snc@phac-aspc.gc.ca).

Learn more: [Guidance for marine vessels: How to use the Maritime Declaration of Health](#)

### **Gastrointestinal Illness**

A reportable case of gastrointestinal illness is defined as:

- diarrhea (3 or more episodes of loose stools in a 24-hour period or what is above normal for the individual) **or**
- vomiting and 1 additional symptom, including:
  - 1 or more episodes of loose stools in a 24-hour period
  - abdominal cramps
  - headache
  - muscle aches
  - fever (temperature of 38°C [100.4°F] or higher)

Gastrointestinal illness reporting should be completed by **all cruise ships** 24 to 36 hours prior to the first expected port of arrival into Canada. This process does not apply to cargo vessels.

PHAC operates a gastrointestinal illness surveillance system for cruise ships entering Canadian waters. If gastrointestinal illness on board is widespread and above public health thresholds, PHAC will:

1. respond
2. investigate the outbreak

3. work to provide the vessel owner and operator with guidance to bring the outbreak under control

Gastrointestinal reporting should be submitted electronically through PHAC's Gastrointestinal Illness Surveillance System. You can access the reporting forms, including additional information on when to report, through this system: [Report using the Gastrointestinal Illness Surveillance System](#)

Any questions regarding gastrointestinal illness reporting can be sent by email to the Travelling Public Program at [tpp-ppv@phac-aspc.gc.ca](mailto:tpp-ppv@phac-aspc.gc.ca). Cruise ship operators can also contact the 24/7 PHAC Notification Line at 1-833-615-2384 if they encounter difficulties with submitting the forms electronically.

### **Reporting both types of illness**

In some instances, an operator may have travellers or crew on board with signs and symptoms of both gastrointestinal illness and a communicable disease of quarantine concern.

To properly process these cases, the operator should meet the requirements for **both** gastrointestinal illness reporting and communicable disease of quarantine concern reporting. Guidance on your reporting obligations can be found [here](#).