

CORRESPONDENT'S ADVICE

BELGIUM

20 SEP 2021

COVID-19 and vaccination

The following information was received from our correspondent on 20 Sep:

QUOTE

We like to share information on the specific situation related to COVID-19 in Belgian ports.

1. Crew members testing positive to PCR-tests.

Crew members of vessels in Belgian ports are not tested systematically. However, the vessel is obliged to report all persons showing symptoms of a COVID-19 infection to the Belgian Health Authorities.

In case a crew member is found positive after a PCR-test, the complete crew of the vessel has to go into quarantine for 10 days.

The crew members who have tested positive and who are not essential for the safety of the vessel, are to go in isolation in a care centre ashore opened specifically for seamen who have to go into quarantine.

The day crew members are found positive to COVID, is considered to be "day 0".

All other crew members are tested on day 1 and on day 7. If both tests are negative for all other crew members the quarantine is lifted on day 10.

If one of both tests would be positive for one or more crew members, the quarantine re-starts from day 0.

These infected crew members are then to go into isolation ashore as well. Except if the person is critical for the safety of the vessel, the crew member can stay on board in strict isolation.



DISCLAIMER

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The Belgian Health Authorities are very much in favour of a complete crew change in order to reduce the risk of extended quarantine periods.

2. Vaccination of seafarers in Belgian ports.

The Belgian Health Authorities have started a campaign allowing seafarers to get a vaccine.

The purpose of the campaign is multi-fold:

- Adding to increase the level of vaccination.
- Decreasing the risk of (serious) health problems of seafarers often at long distance from medical help.
- Avoiding the import of COVID-19 virus during future calls of vessel in (Belgian) ports.
- Avoiding periods of quarantine and immobilisation of vessels in (Belgian) ports.

UNQUOTE

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Procedural Aspects of CoViD-19 Vaccinations for International Seafarers in Belgian Ports

Introduction

The increasing availability of safe and authorized CoViD-19 vaccines for the first time provides the opportunity to vaccinate seafarers on board their ships while in port.

Speedy vaccination of seafarers secures their health and serves to avoid the international propagation of CoViD-19 virus variants via maritime traffic.

Detailed guidance on CoViD-19 vaccination in shipping and accompanying legal issues was published by the **International Chamber of Shipping (ICS)**: www.ics-shipping.org
Coronavirus (COVID-19) Roadmap for Vaccination of International Seafarers (1)
Coronavirus (COVID-19) Legal, Liability and Insurance Issues Arising from Vaccination of Seafarers (2)

In addition to the information provided by the manufacturers on the application of vaccines and the recommendations of the Belgian Government Corona Commission, these ICS guidelines provide a basis for all parties for the joint execution of vaccinations on board, in particular about issues of liability, data protection, safety and the voluntary nature of vaccination.

The responsible port health services, must be informed about the start of vaccination activities in the port area.

Who is vaccinated?

In Belgian ports J&J vaccine will be offered to international visiting seafarers. This vaccine requires only one dose.

Only seafarers who have NOT received a vaccine approved by the EMA in the EU yet, will be vaccinated. A seafarer vaccinated with another vaccine (non-EU listed) may request a vaccination.

Second doses of EU listed vaccines are not available for seafarers in Belgian ports.

The vaccination is voluntary, individual seafarers give their consent to be vaccinated.

The J&J vaccine is available for 18yr plus in the EU and in Belgium 40 year olds and less have to give their permission to get the vaccine. Therefore the documentation contains a brochure from the Belgian Authorities explaining the issue. Seafarers younger than 40 yrs will give their consent prior to vaccination.

Organisation

The vaccines will be kept, prepared and distributed from two medical centres:

Port of Antwerp and Port of Ghent:

Mediport

Italiëlei 51

2000 Antwerpen

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Mobile: Kris Lemmens for emergencies only +32 474 25 05 09

Port of Zeebrugge:

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In these centres, vaccines may be administered to on-signers and off-signers, and seafarers attending for testing, fitness examinations or medical treatments.

From these centres teams will collect syringes with prepared vaccines and go to ships to vaccinate seafarers on board.

The teams will consist of doctors and/or nurses, their number depending on the number of vaccines ordered.

They will have their own transport to the ship, they are equipped with all personal protection material terminals may require and will be announced prior to arrival via the appropriate system, where necessary assisted by the agent.

Planning of the vaccinations

48 hours before berthing, the agent informs the responsible medical centre by email about a request for vaccination by the master of a vessel:

- The number of vaccines requested, keeping in mind that only non-vaccinated crew can be vaccinated, those who have received a first dose of another vaccine elsewhere cannot be vaccinated with J&J.
- The estimated time of berthing and the expected total time in port.
- Where possible masters can also send crew to the medical centre for vaccination, this especially if the number is small, like 4 persons or less.

In respect of the first call, first served principle the dispatch at the medical centre also takes into account:

- Date and time of the request by email
- The number of vaccines requested (the more, the higher the priority)
- The return of the vessel to a Belgian port (regular ships may have to wait for ships coming only occasionally)
- The total time in port (the longer the vessel stays, the less urgent vaccination is)
- The accessibility of the terminal (the less time a team spends on a vaccination job, the more chance to get it done)

The vaccination is offered but cannot be claimed, the capacity of the medical centres and teams is expanded but has limitations. Availability of teams and vaccines may fluctuate, the medical centres therefore may not be able to fulfil every request made, certainly not in the beginning of the campaign.

In the beginning the teams will work early and late, but no night work and not during weekends.

Vaccines

Janssen[®] vaccine by Johnson & Johnson can be applied for seafarers as it is especially suited; it needs to be applied only once, it is easier to prepare and can be kept protected against light in a cool box for 3 to 6 hours.

In the EU, the vaccine is authorised for persons aged 18 and over; based on the current data, the Belgian Government Corona Commission recommends that Johnson & Johnson's vaccine Janssen[®] should normally be used for persons aged 41 and over. The use of this vaccine as a one-time vaccination below this age limit is permitted based on medical information and individual risk acceptance by the vaccinee and makes sense in view of the above-mentioned advantage for seafarers in active employment.

The teams

The medical centres work with teams of doctors and nurses who go on board. These teams are instructed on safety issues of the terminals and on board ship.

Specific instructions and SOP's of entrance, transport and exit procedures on terminals are communicated to the medical centres and teams beforehand by the operators and/or shipping agents.

The teams have personal protection material as required by the port, made available to them at the medical centres.

The teams have mobile phones and emergency numbers and first aid equipment and instructions.

Also protective clothing and material to clean and disinfect surfaces and to organize the vaccination on board.

Cool boxes and medical bags to transport the vaccines, medical instruments and sharps containers.

Access to terminals

The agency assists the medical centres to get access to the terminals easily, with priority, avoiding waiting time and repeated instruction, because of the limited time for the vaccine transport.

Teams have all equipment and personal protection material (helmet, goggles, vest,...) they may need for safety.

Their arrival to the terminal is announced by the agents upon request of the medical centres.

Vaccination

Beforehand the crew has been provided with information sheets in advance. As well as the information on the J&J vaccine by the Belgian authorities.

The International Chamber of Shipping has written a general statement on COVID-19 for shipping to be made available to seafarers in advance: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Vaccination for Seafarers and Shipping Companies: A Practical Guide Your Questions Answered (5) www.ics-shipping.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Coronavirus-COVID-19-Vaccination-for-Seafarers-and-Shipping-Companies-A-Practical-Guide.pdf

The master makes a room available for the teams with enough space to organize the vaccination in a clean way and respect the rules of distancing and protection during the procedure (preferably mess room or bridge, also depending on the ventilation available).

A crew list is available and the persons who will be vaccinated are marked on that list, meaning that the master has verified if the person has already been vaccinated for Covid-19 before and if the person volunteers for Johnson and Johnson vaccine.

The vaccinations are checked for temperature and time stamp, it is verified if they are kept cool and protected from light and vibration during transport before administration to the candidates.

The crew is lined up in an orderly way, with respect for social distancing, and assisted by the master / officer responsible for medical care on board.

The vaccinator takes a short medical history of the seafarers and questions them on allergies and adverse reactions on vaccines in the past to identify possible contraindications.

The vaccination is administered by the vaccinator.

The master organises ample seating with respect of social distancing for all vaccinated to be seated, so that the medical team can observe the patients for 15 minutes after injection for acute complications.

In case of problems with the organisation of a timely vaccination, the teams may set a time limit within which they leave the ship, to go vaccinate on a next vessel in time, with respect to the cold chain of other vaccines transported. Never should a team be more than one hour on board.

Certification

The certification of the vaccination is issued in the international vaccination card (the yellow booklet), date, disease, vaccine, lot number, signature and stamp of the doctor.

The team carries a number of spare vaccination cards to issue them to those who do not have one.

If a team has no doctor, the cards are collected, brought to the medical centre, signed and stamped, and returned to the vessel via the agent.

The vaccination team takes a list of all vaccinated crew with them to keep record of the vaccinations in the medical centre.

The vaccinations are recorded at the medical centres but are NOT registered in the national Belgian vaccination database: Vaccinet.

Cost

The cost of vaccination is free of charge for the seafarer. The vaccine is offered by the authorities. There is an administrative and handling cost that covers:

- Storage of the vaccines
- Preparing and labelling of the individual doses
- Cold chain during transport
- The injection
- The certification
- Observation and assistance to the patients
- Equipment, personal protection and emergency preparedness of the teams
- Planning and booking of the vaccinations
- Administration
- Working time of the doctors and nurses
- Travel expenses back and forth to the ship
- Overhead costs

Data protection

The seagoing population must be assured that vaccination remains a voluntary action and the employer does not have any access to the medical data of crew members. The medical history and consent sheets remain with the vaccinators (the retention period is 10 years). The general data protection rules apply to the collection and processing of health data under the GDPR.

Equipment

To be made available on board by the shipping company / master.

- Suitable vaccination area, e.g. office or mess-room with a large clean desk, bridge.
- Nearby waiting and observation area
- Seating accommodation for all vaccinated for 15- 30 min, at least one berth
- FFP2-/surgical masks for vaccinees
- Water available

To be brought by the vaccinating physicians:

- Vaccines and paraphernalia
- Personal protective equipment
- Batch sticker, vaccination stamp, health certificate (in lieu of Vacc. Certif.)
- The medication for the treatment of anaphylactic emergencies is brought on board in their emergency set by the vaccinating physicians.

Clearance for passing through restricted port areas and access to the ship must be provided by the ship-owner, ship agent or master in advance.

Protective equipment for vaccinators

- Depending on the terminal traffic situation: warning light for the car
- Safety shoes, at least closed footwear with non-slip sole
- Protective helmet, size adjustable
- Safety jacket (reflective)
- Protective gloves
- Rescue vest as appropriate
- Mobile phone / hands-free system in the car
- Sufficient transportation bags for vaccines and emergency equipment (preferred rucksack to keep hands free)
- Single-use gloves, FFP 2 mask

Time assessment

- Travelling from office to terminal: 30-60 min

- Individual voyage from terminal entrance to ship: as short as possible, 15-30 min
- Establishment of the vaccination area, getting to know the location, assessment of emergency equipment: 30 min
- vaccination: 30-60 min
- follow-up: 15 - 30 min/person

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Notice to ships, shipowners and agents

Vaccination of seafarers in Belgian Ports

The Belgian Shipowner Association, the Taskforce Vaccination and the Directorate General Shipping has launched a full scale COVID-19 vaccination campaign for all seafarers calling with a ship in a Belgian Port.

To facilitate the accessibility of the seafarers to the vaccination campaign, mobile medical vaccination teams will be sent to the ships at berth, to provide the vaccinations directly on board. The mobile medical vaccination teams will operate from two maritime medical centers in Antwerp and Zeebrugge, covering the ports of Antwerp, Ghent and Zeebrugge.

The vaccine provided will be the Johnson & Johnson single jab vaccine.

The vaccination campaign is expected to start on Monday 26 July 2021.

Scope

The Belgian Shipowner Association, the Taskforce Vaccination and the Directorate General Shipping has launched a full scale COVID-19 vaccination campaign for all seafarers calling with a ship in a Belgian Port.

1. The campaign is applicable to the following category of maritime workers:

- Seafarers, of all nationalities serving on board any type or category of seagoing ship calling in the ports of Antwerp, Ghent or Zeebrugge.

And,

- who have not yet received a doses of an European Medicines Agency (EMA) approved COVID-19 vaccine in the last 12 months.

2. The campaign is not applicable to the following category of persons:

Persons sailing on board any ship not considered as seafarer, such as special personnel, industrial personnel, superintendents, technicians, passengers

Or

Seafarers who have received at least one doses of a EMA approved COVID-19 vaccine in the last 12 months.

3. A seafarer mentioned under (2) should be able to provide proof of the following:
 - a. A seafarer's employment agreement, issued under the national law
 - b. A seamen's book or similar proof of identification as seafarer.

Procedure of application

1. Any shipping company, captain or agent (mentioned as “applicant”), may apply for the vaccination of crew on board a ship, scheduled to call at the Belgian Ports of Antwerp, Ghent or Zeebrugge.
2. Any application shall be made at least 48 hours prior expected arrival at berth of the vessel
3. The application shall be send to the following maritime medical centers:

Port of Antwerp and Port of Ghent:

Mediport

Italiëlei 51

2000 Antwerpen

mediport@online.be

+32 32 29 07 70

Mobile: Kris Lemmens for emergencies only +32 474 25 05 09

Port of Zeebrugge:

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4. The application must contain at least the following information:
 - a. The list of seafarers or crewmembers to be vaccinated, containing name(s), surname, date of birth and nationality
 - b. Details of the ship
 - i. Name of the ship
 - ii. IMO number
 - iii. Expected date/time of berthing
 - iv. Expected date/time of departure (or shifting)
 - v. Port and location of berth
 - c. Requested date/time of vaccination mentioned as date + am/pm
 - d. Contact details of applying party (shipping company, captain or agent)
 - e. Any other relevant information related to COVID-19 (any previous vaccinations, health conditions)
 - f. Any other logistic information (accessibility of the ship)
5. On receiving an application, the maritime medical center will confirm (or refuse) the vaccination request to the applicant. In addition, it will either confirm the proposed date/time (4c) or it will propose an alternative date/time taking into account the expected time of berthing and departure.

Very important additional information

1. The applicant may request a vaccination, but may not claim a vaccination. The vaccination team will do the utmost to honor any application for vaccination, however this may not always be guaranteed. The vaccination remains subject to the vaccines availability and logistic issues. The vaccination may be prioritized based on objective reasons and remains non-discriminatory at all times.
2. The vaccination shall be on a voluntary basis, meaning that a vaccine will only be given to a seafarer based on his free will. Furthermore, based on the voluntary nature of the vaccination, the seafarer agrees on the health risks and side effects related to the vaccination, which will be notified in a separate leaflet.
3. In respect of the information to be provided in 4.a, it is the decision and responsibility of the master of the ship to indicate the number of crewmembers and whom to be vaccinated, taking into account possible side effects and by assessing the operational requirements of his ship.
4. Further in respect of 4.a. the mobile vaccination on board the ship is only applicable for 5 or more crewmembers. In case an application is send for 4 or less crewmembers, the applicant shall make own arrangements to send the crew members for vaccination at one of the above mentioned medical centers.
5. The number of crewmembers mentioned in 4.a. shall be very precise and specific. The mobile medical teams will carry the exact number of vaccines as per the submitted list, and will therefore not honor any additional last minute vaccination when on board. Also the vaccines will only be given to the persons mentioned on the submitted list. The mobile medical team has the right to suspend any vaccination in case of noncompliance with the submitted information or false information.
6. The applicant shall ensure that the relevant crewmembers to be vaccinated are available on board and free from any immediate duty at the date and time confirmed by the medical center. The applicant shall facilitate the vaccination process on board, by providing access to the ship and accommodation (space) suitable to receive the medical team and crewmembers.

Process of vaccination

The mobile medical vaccination team will consist of medically trained staff composed of one or two nurses and one doctor either in the mobile team or remotely from the medical center.

The mobile medical vaccination team will proceed to the indicated location/berth of the ship as mentioned in 4.b.v above on the reconfirmed date and time. There may be variation in the time due to traffic conditions and access to the port/terminal

The medical vaccination team will carry sufficient credentials to access the terminal and the ship.

The medical vaccination teams will carry the exact number of requested vaccines in a cooled container. These must be applied within a determined timeframe without delay. The shipboard shall grant sufficient priority to the vaccination by preparing the vaccination and mustering the concerned crewmembers to a dedicated accommodation space.

The vaccination process on board will be according to following steps:

- 1) Anamneses and medical enquiry of each individual crewmember prior vaccination
- 2) Application of the vaccination
- 3) Registration of vaccination
- 4) 15 minutes observation for possible anaphylaxis reaction

The process should take on average 1 hour depending of the number of crewmembers, language and logistical issues.

During the whole process on board the medical vaccination team will strictly adhere to the medical secrecy and will not disclose any medical information to any third person or party.

Registration of vaccination

Any COVID-19 vaccination, carried out, shall be registered in a personal vaccination booklet of the seafarer concerned. This registration or endorsement shall serve as proof of COVID-19 vaccination.

The applicable vaccination booklet is the “WHO International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis” (Yellow booklet).

In principle the COVID-19 vaccination will be registered or endorsed in an existing WHO International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis, of the seafarer if available on board.

Alternatively a new WHO International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis booklet will be issued at the name of the seafarer.

In the WHO International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis booklet, the type and date of vaccination will be mentioned and signed/stamped by a duly authorized physician.

If a duly authorized physician is accompanying the medical vaccination team, all relevant WHO International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis booklet will be endorsed or issued accordingly on board.

If no duly authorized physician is accompanying the medical vaccination team, the existing and relevant WHO International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis booklets will be collected by the medical vaccination team and taken to the medical center. In the medical center a duly authorized

physician will endorse or issue the WHO International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis booklets for all crewmembers. The agent shall collect the booklets from the medical center and send these on board the ship.

Costs

The administered vaccines are provided free of charge. However a fixed fee of per ship is applicable for the administration of the vaccines by the medical vaccination team. This fee is independent to the number of crewmembers to be vaccinated (5 or more).

The fee is non profit and is intended to cover following costs:

- Transportation cost of the medical vaccination team
- Labour costs
- Administration cost (registration and certification)
- Medical equipment and protection equipment
- Overhead costs (at cost)

This fee will be invoiced to the applicant, following the vaccination carried out.