

# COVID-19 CONTINGENCY PLANNING GUIDE FOR TOWING VESSEL AND BARGE OPERATORS



The ongoing outbreak of the novel coronavirus first detected in China has spread to over 60 countries around the world, including the United States. The respiratory disease this virus causes has been named “Coronavirus Disease 2019,” or COVID-19. According to the Centers for Disease Control, more cases of COVID-19 are likely to be identified in the U.S. in the coming days as the spread of the virus continues. AWO has created this resource – drawing on information provided by the CDC and other sources – to assist tugboat, towboat and barge companies in developing and implementing a COVID-19 contingency plan to protect their workforce while ensuring continuity of operations.

## GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19

**How does the novel coronavirus spread?** Like the common cold and flu, the virus is believed to be spread by respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of uninfected people who are nearby, or possibly be inhaled into their lungs. It is also possible that they can land on surfaces or objects, and if an uninfected person touches these surfaces or objects then touches their mouth, nose, or eyes, they may be exposed.

**Where has COVID-19 been detected in the U.S.?** Community spread of the virus that causes COVID-19 has now been reported in the U.S., meaning that some people who have been infected have not traveled internationally, have not to their knowledge been in close contact with someone who has traveled internationally, and do not know how or where they became infected. Click [here](#) for more information about confirmed COVID-19 cases in the U.S.

**What are the symptoms of COVID-19?** Symptoms of COVID-19 may appear 2-14 days after exposure and may include fever, cough, and shortness of breath or difficulty breathing. Some people are at higher risk for severe illness, including older adults and those with chronic medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes and heart disease.

Source: CDC [COVID-19 Situation Summary](#)

## DEVELOPING A COVID-19 CONTINGENCY PLAN

### AT THE MANAGEMENT LEVEL

- **Identify and communicate your plan objectives**, which may include reducing transmission among staff, maintaining business operations, and minimizing adverse effects on other entities in your supply chains.
- **Identify essential business functions, essential roles, and critical elements within your supply chains required to maintain business operations.**
  - Prepare for increased numbers of employee absences. Plan to monitor and respond to absenteeism. Cross-train personnel to perform essential business functions in case you experience higher than usual absenteeism.
  - Prepare to change your operations if needed to maintain essential business functions (e.g., identify alternative suppliers, prioritize customers, or temporarily suspend operations in affected areas).
- **Plan to minimize exposure between employees if public health officials call for social distancing.**
  - Explore whether you can establish practices like telecommuting and staggered shifts to increase the physical distance among employees if social distancing is recommended.
  - Ensure that the information technology and infrastructure is in place to support telecommuting.
- **Review human resources policies to ensure they are consistent with public health guidance.**
  - Prepare to institute flexible leave policies for sick employees, those who stay home to care for sick family members, and those who stay home with their children if schools and childcare programs are dismissed.
  - Do not require a healthcare provider’s note from sick employees to validate their illness or to return to work, as healthcare providers may be extremely busy and unable to provide such documentation in a timely way.
- **Conduct a focused discussion or exercise using your plan** to identify gaps or problems that need to be corrected.
- **Establish a process to communicate your plan and other COVID-19 information to employees and business partners.**
  - Share your plan with employees and explain what human resources policies, workplace and leave flexibilities, and pay and benefits will be available to them. Anticipate employee fear and rumors and plan communications accordingly.
  - Share your plan with other companies in your supply chain and community to improve preparedness and response.
- **Coordinate with [state](#) and [local](#) health officials** to guide appropriate responses in each area where you have operations.
- **If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19**, employers should inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Fellow employees should refer to CDC guidance for [how to conduct a risk assessment](#) of their potential exposure.
  - Employees who have had close contact with anyone confirmed to have COVID-19 should notify their supervisor.

• Source: CDC [Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to COVID-19](#)

**DISCLAIMER:** According to the CDC, to prevent stigma and discrimination in the workplace, use official CDC guidance to determine risk of COVID-19, do not make determinations based on race or country of origin, and be sure to maintain confidentiality of people with confirmed COVID-19.

## STRATEGIES FOR ALL EMPLOYEES

- **Emphasize respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene by all employees.**
  - Place posters that encourage [cough and sneeze etiquette](#) and [hand hygiene](#) in highly trafficked workplace areas.
  - Advise employees to wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if no soap and water is available. Provide soap and water and alcohol-based hand sanitizers (at least 60% alcohol) in the workplace.
  - Advise employees to cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, or use their elbow or shoulder if no tissue is available. Dispose of used tissues immediately. Provide tissues and no-touch trash cans in the workplace.
- **Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace.** These may include doorknobs, workstations, and countertops. Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces can be wiped down by employees before each use.
- **Actively encourage sick employees to stay home, and separate and send home sick employees.**
  - Employees who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness should notify their supervisor and stay home until they are free of fever (100.4° F/37.8° C or above), signs of a fever, and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines.
  - Employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e., cough, shortness of breath) upon arrival to work or who appear to become sick during the day should be separated from other employees and be sent home immediately.
- **Advise employees to consider COVID-19 risks when conducting business or personal travel.**
  - Ask employees to defer nonessential travel to areas for which the CDC has issued [Travel Health Notices](#).
  - Advise employees to check themselves for symptoms of acute respiratory illness before starting business travel and notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.
  - Ensure employees who become sick while traveling on business understand that they should notify their supervisor and promptly call a healthcare provider for advice if needed.

Source: CDC [Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to COVID-19](#)

## STRATEGIES FOR TOWING VESSEL CREWMEMBERS

- **Encourage crewmembers to monitor their health and report fit for duty.**
  - Educate crewmembers about the signs, symptoms, and transmission of COVID-19.
  - The master should monitor the crew for any symptoms and report them to dispatch immediately.
  - Crewmembers should inform the master immediately if they develop a fever (100.4° F/37.8° C or above), begin to feel feverish, or develop other signs or symptoms of sickness.
- **Educate crewmembers on respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene.**
  - Remind crewmembers to wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after coughing or sneezing. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
  - Advise crewmembers of the importance of covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue and disposing used tissues immediately. If no tissue is available, use your elbow or shoulder.
- **Ensure the following supplies are consistently available onboard the vessel:** soap (does not need to be antibacterial), disposable hand towels, alcohol-based hand sanitizers (at least 60% alcohol), tissues, no-touch trash cans, surface cleaning supplies, disposable wipes, an oral thermometer, and disposable gloves.
- **Isolate a crewmember that develops signs or symptoms of acute respiratory illness until they are able to get off the vessel.**
  - Place the crewmember in their stateroom or in an isolation room designated by the master and keep the door closed.
  - Limit the number of people who interact with the sick crewmember and maintain a log listing them. To the extent possible, have a single person give care and meals to the sick crewmember.
  - Instruct people who interact with the sick crewmember to use and properly dispose of PPE, including mask (if available) and gloves, and wash hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based sanitizer after removing gloves.
  - Keep interactions with the sick crewmember as brief as possible and, if possible, maintain a distance of 6 feet.
  - Limit the movement of the sick crewmember from the stateroom or isolation room for essential purposes only, and clean the surfaces potentially contaminated by the sick crewmember.
  - People who have had close contact with the sick crewmember should, if feasible, self-isolate, and at a minimum, self-monitor for signs or symptoms of sickness.
- **Report signs or symptoms of acute respiratory illness to the Coast Guard and CDC as required.**
  - Illness of a person onboard a vessel that may adversely affect the safety of a vessel or port facility is a hazardous condition per 33 CFR 160.216 and must be immediately reported to the U.S. Coast Guard COTP under 33 CFR 160.216.
  - Vessels that have visited a foreign port and are returning to a U.S. port [are required to report to the CDC](#) any illnesses or deaths among the vessel's crewmembers per 42 CFR 71.21.

Source: CDC [Interim Guidance for Ships on Managing Suspected COVID-19](#)

Other Resources: [World Health Organization COVID-19 Information](#)  
[International Maritime Organization COVID-19 Information](#)