

Infection prevention and control considerations for handling cargo in the context of COVID-19

Interim guidance

11 September 2020



1. Introduction

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory disease caused by a virus that is transmitted via droplets through close contact with an infected individual. These droplets (e.g. from coughs, sneezes and body fluids) may land on objects and surfaces around the person. Other people may become infected by touching these contaminated objects or surfaces and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

Infection prevention and control measures for COVID-19 include:

- a. regularly clean hands with an alcohol-based hand rub (20 seconds) or wash hands with soap and water (40 seconds);
- b. keep at least 1 metre distance from other people; and
- c. practise good respiratory hygiene and avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

1.1 Purpose and target audience

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance on infection prevention and control measures for all those who are involved with handling cargo during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this document, cargo refers to any goods or products carried by air (e.g. small charter planes), water (e.g. ships, boats and canoes) or land (any vehicle).

This document will be updated as new evidence becomes available.

2. Key messages

2.1 Risk of infection from cargo

To date, there is no data to suggest that contact with goods or products shipped from countries affected by the COVID-19 outbreak have been the source of COVID-19 infection in humans¹. However, care must be taken to regularly clean hands and avoid touching the eyes, nose and mouth.

2.2 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The recommended PPE used for physical protection of cargo handlers against injury does not change in the context of COVID-19. Other forms of PPE to protect against the virus such as medical masks, gowns and disposable gloves are not required. Follow routine procedures for loading and unloading of cargo. If heavy-duty gloves are used for physical protection when handling cargo, they do not replace the need for appropriate hand hygiene, which should be performed frequently.

2.3 Cleaning and disinfection of cargo

There is no requirement for spraying, decontamination/cleaning or disinfection of cargo or pallets.

2.4 Quarantine of cargo

Quarantine of cargo is not recommended and should be avoided. Pay attention to temperature-sensitive cargo and the requirements for proper storage and handling to control temperature, exposure to direct sunlight and humidity levels. Not controlling these factors may damage sensitive cargo, particularly urgent medical supplies, and may pose a risk of delays in the delivery of essential supplies such as medicines and medical consumables.

2.5 Considerations for cargo companies

- Monitor all employees for fever and other COVID-19 symptoms. Instruct employees who are unwell to stay away from the workplace even if they have mild symptoms.
- Ensure adequate supplies are available for performing hand hygiene frequently with an alcohol-based hand rub, if available and hands are not visibly dirty, or with soap and water when hands are dirty.
- Consider providing employees with individual alcohol-based hand rub and encourage frequent use.
- Display posters promoting hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene.
- Apply physical distancing rules in the workplace.
- Increase schedules for cleaning and disinfecting work areas² and other common areas. This should include daily (at least) wiping of frequently touched surfaces such as handrails, desks, lift buttons, control panels and other equipment that employees typically come into contact with.
- Limit access to the facility. Meet drivers and other non-essential visitors in the yard instead of entering the facility. Keep a record of all individuals on-site and visitors to the facility.

3. Guidance development

3.1 Acknowledgements

This document was developed by a guideline development group composed of staff from the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific.

3.2 Guidance development methods

This document was developed based on adaptation of WHO COVID-19 global interim guidance, review of relevant literature, expert consultation, and guideline development group discussion and consensus.

3.3 Declaration of interests

Interests have been declared in line with WHO policy, and no conflicts of interest were identified from any of the contributors.

References

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