



Health & Safety and Public Health on Board Vessels During New Coronavirus Outbreak (2019-nCoV)

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Abstract

Passenger and cargo unit transportation and harvesting fish stock are the lifebloods of global economy. 90% of global trade by volume is carried on across the world by ships. 30 million passengers are transported on 272 cruise liner worldwide each year. Fish is an important source of protein for people. Estimated 2 million seamen who work on board vessels as seafarer and 27 million fishermen who work on commercial fishing vessels to capture fish stocks. The recent coronavirus pandemic disease (COVID-19) has shown that maritime and commercial fishing industry are a critical working environments and seafarers and fishermen are also a critical skills and professions. In this comment, the importance of marine medicine during COVID-19 pandemic and developing on maritime medicine and introduction of newly established departments in University of Health Sciences, Turkey are tried to be discussed.

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Approximately 90% of global trade by volume is carried on across the world by ships. Additionally, apart from good and cargo transportations in maritime sector, an estimated 30 million passengers are transported on 272 cruise liner worldwide each year. Seafood is an important source for human being and fish is an important source of protein for mankind. Fishing has a tremendous economic importance, providing a major food source of all world population. Approximately 2 million seamen who work on board vessels and an estimated 27 million fishers who work on commercial fishing vessels to capture

fish stocks.¹ The recent coronavirus epidemic disease (COVID-19) has shown that maritime and commercial fishing industry are a critical working environment and seafarers and fishermen are also a critical skills and professions. Turkey is a port, flag and coastal state.²

Transport by sea and commercial fishing which are the lifebloods of global economy, COVID-19 has shown the importance of maritime and commercial fishing industry. In this respect, continuous free movement of fishers and seafarer on working vessels and free passage across borders are taken as a basis even in COVID-19 pandemic.³



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Ships in general as a working environments, bring many seamen, fishers and passengers together in semi enclosed spaces such as cabins, messrooms, restaurants, bars, may facilitate transmission of respiratory diseases.⁴ Many operational guides have been prepared by World Health Organization (WHO) after COVID-19. These guides are for any authority which is related to public health response to any event onboard ships and ports such as port and border health authorities (General Directorate of Border and Coastal Health), port authorities, harbor masters, ship operators and owners and also ship health officers, doctors and ship crew members.^{5,6} The virus named as Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV), causes illness which was initially seen in Wuhan city, China, on 31 December 2019. Some confirmed cases of 2019-nCoV have been reported from ships as well during COVID-19 outbreak all over the world.⁷ The coronavirus COVID-19 is affecting 213 countries and territories around the world. Two passenger cruise liners named Diamond Princess and MS Zaandam on international shipping trade by date 06 June 2020 were also affected.⁸ This situation showed that seafarers, crew and passengers are at greater risk for severe consequences of 2019-nCoV disease. First cases were reported from cruise liner ship Diamond Princess which was in Japan. During 2019-nCoV outbreak cases reported not only from Diamond Princess but also from different types of ships such as RO-RO/Passenger. Ship named El. Venizelos is chartered to use as a hostel ship for workers and seafarers in Spain. Some Turkish workers and seafarers were also embarked on board in Turkey. Later ship started

to sail for Spain. When the ship was on the way, 2019-nCoV spreaded worldwide. Spain was badly affected from 2019-nCoV. No permission was given to berth to the port for El. Venizelos due to the spread of 2019-nCoV in Spain. El. Venizelos started to return to Turkey. COVID-19 was first identified on board vessel El. Venizelos while ship was at sea en route. Ship came back to Turkey to leave Turkish seafarers and workers. Due to safety issues the master of the ship did not allow the crew and workers to disembark from the ship. Later the ship sailed for the next port of call which was in Greece. Two persons were disembarked from the ship for hospitalization. Greek authorities reported COVID-19 diagnosis in 121 personnel who were the crew and workers and the ship was quarantined. 65 cases out of total 121 cases were Turkish crew and workers. Personnel whose COVID-19 test results were positive, were quarantined in different cabins on board vessel as shown in figures (*Figures a and b*).⁹⁻¹² Crew and workers whose test results were negative, disembarked from the ship and placed to hotels ashore. Apart from this, 4 crew members with coronavirus symptoms who were working on Turkish aircraft carrier were disembarked for hospitalization from the ship in Turkey. Ship was trading regularly en route between Turkey and Italy. One out of four crew had a positive test result.¹³

Conflict of interest

The author declared that there are no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.



Figure a: Quarantine on board for seafarer

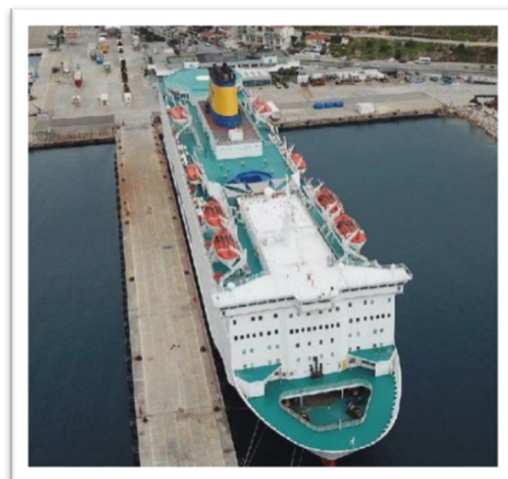


Figure b: Ship is lying in port

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