Input paper: [[1]](#footnote-1)VTS49-3.2.3

Input paper for the following Committee(s): check as appropriate Purpose of paper:

**□**ARM **□**ENG **□**PAP **√** Input

**□**ENAV **√**VTS **□**Information

Agenda item [[2]](#footnote-2) 3

Technical Domain / Task Number 2 n/a

Author(s) / Submitter(s) China MSA

Recommendations for VTS Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

# Summary

This document, taking the perspective of the function of VTS, proposes suggestions on dynamic monitoring and management of infected ships by VTS to assist port health and epidemic prevention departments to deal with on board COVID-19 outbreak.

## Purpose of the document

The purposes of the document are to:

* Provide recommendations for VTS to assist port health and epidemic prevention departments in responding to COVID-19 outbreaks on board;
* Provide reference for VTS authorities to deal with similar public health emergencies.

## Related documents

* *World Health Organization Coronavirus disease(COVID-19) Situation Report*
* *International Health Regulations (2005)*
* *Circular Letter No.4204-Add.4-Rev.1 - Coronavirus (Covid-19)– ICS Guidance for ship operators for the protection of the health of seafarers*
* *Circular Letter No.4204-Add.16 - Coronavirus (Covid-19)COVID-19 related guidelines for ensuring a safe shipboard interface between ship and shore-based personnel*
* *Circular Letter No.4204-Add.23 - Coronavirus (Covid-19)Recommendations for port and coastal States on the prompt disembarkation of seafarers for medical care ashore during the COVID-19 pandemic*
* *Circular Letter No.4204-Add.24 - Coronavirus (Covid-19) Outcome of the International Maritime Virtual Summit on Crew Changes organized by the United Kingdom*
* *Circular Letter No.4204-Add.25 - Coronavirus (Covid-19)Outcome of surveys by ICS and ITF on health protection measures on board ships in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic*

# Background

Ships sailing among various ports around the world have the potential risks of carrying COVID-19. Although VTS is not directly responsible for epidemic prevention and response in ports, as a link between ship and shore, VTS can take full use of the advantages of fast access to ship and shore information and real-time ship dynamics, and play an active role in assisting ports to cope with COVID-19 pandemic.

# Discussion

## People on board may be infected with or become spreaders of COVID-19

* Ships shuttling among various ports are easy to cross-infect with shore-based support personnel such as pilots and port operators.
* The living space on the ship is closed and small. Once a person is infected with the virus, it is easy to infect other people on board.
* Shipboard personnel, especially crew members, have been infected with the virus and cannot perform their duties normally, which will affect navigation safety of the ship.

## VTS is the bond between ship and shore

* VTS provides ship dynamic surveillance,establishes communication links, and easily obtains ship real-time conditions,VTS is able to provide people on board medical assistance in no time.
* VTS is able to have the ship plan and schedule of next and last port of call in advance.
* VTS has a good command of knowledge in fairway,anchorage and traffic conditions. It can provide advice for port health and epidemic prevention departments and arrange berth and anchor position for the infected ship as epidemic prevention requires.

## VTS can provide support for ship epidemic

VTS could consider taking necessary measures to assist port health and epidemic prevention departments in responding to the coronavirus infection of crew members, preventing further transmission of the virus through crewmembers. At the same time, it can reduce or avoid the impact on the safety and efficiency of navigation in the process of epidemic prevention and control.

# recommendation

## Information processing

**4.1.1 Information collection**

VTS may strengthen communication with port health and epidemic prevention departments, port management departments, wharves, agents and other relevant parties, so as to obtain the latest port requirements on ship against COVID-19 pandemic in time. VTS shall obtain relevant information of ships in VTS coverage area through ship report or active enquiries, including:

* Ship’s name, Call sign, Position,MMSI, Flag state, Port of registry, Last port and Next port;
* Shipowner or local agent and contact information;
* The number of persons on board suspected or confirmed to be infected with COVID-19 coronavirus, their names, genders, duties on board, nationality, place and date of boarding, and measures taken, including personnel isolation, etc;
* List of port of call, list of crew change, number of crew and passengers, and personnel list if necessary;
* Required shore based support, such as VTS, pilot, tug, supply information, etc;
* Other information.

**4.1.2 Information evaluation and transmission**

VTS may evaluate the collected information, keep in touch with port health and epidemic prevention departments and ships, and insure smooth transmission between ship and shore.

* VTS should timely remind the ship to take necessary prevention and control measures after receiving a report of suspected or confirmed infection by the ship, and at the same time pass relevant information to the port health and epidemic prevention department or other port management departments.
* At the request of port health and epidemic prevention departments and the ship, VTS may also communicate other information acquired or the access of acquiring the information.

**4.1.3 Information provision**

In accordance with requirements of the health and epidemic prevention department, the work guidelines and requirements of relevant international organizations, industry associations, port states and coastal states, or at the request of the vessels, VTS could provide ships with the following information:

* Personal protection advice;
* Requirements of port states or coastal states for reporting and responding to infected ship;
* Instructions for emergency operations after a ship having a suspected patient on board;
* Quarantine requirements for confirmed, suspected and close contacts;
* Advice on remote medical services and crew mental health adjustments;
* Contact information of health authorities of port States or coastal States or other competent authorities for epidemic prevention and control;
* Other information.

## Monitoring and management of infected ships

**4.2.1According to the traffic conditions and the needs of pandemic prevention and control, VTS can provide infected ships with:**

* Information related to navigation safety;
* Assistance in the development of VTS navigation plan;
* Designate anchorage areas or temporary berth locations.

**4.2.2 Traffic monitoring and management**

* Track and monitor the dynamics of infected ships, and respond to possible navigation safety risks in time;
* Establish ship domain for infected ships;
* Timely verify the situation when other ships are found approaching infected ships during berthing or anchoring.

**4.2.3 Assistance in the treatment of suspected or confirmed cases**

* If suspected patients are diagnosed, VTS can assist port health and pandemic prevention departments to search for close contacts, including pilots, tugboats, supplies and other shore-based support personnel;
* Due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, crew members cannot perform their duties normally, which will affect the safety of navigation. VTS can provide support and safeguard measures jointly with relevant parties.

## Other suggestions

* If crew members are injured or in other health emergencies other than the COVID-19, VTS can assist MRCC in SAR and report to port health and epidemic prevention departments;
* After a ship with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infections having a water traffic accident, the VTS still needs to perform the responsibility of supporting of allied services and provide support for the effective emergency handling and SAR;
* Considering the particularity of passenger ships, especially large cruise ships, it is recommended that the VTS authorities develop an emergency plan exclusively for passenger ships or participate in the development of "COVID-19 Emergency Response Plan for Passenger Ships" with port health and epidemic prevention departments;
* The VTS authorities should pay attention to impacts of infected ships on navigation safety and port operation efficiency, and work with port management departments to explore measures on crew changes, personnel and cargo clearance and other port services.

# Definition

* Infected ships - Ship with people confirmed and suspected of COVID-19 on board including crew and passenger.
* Health and epidemic prevention department - Department in Port State and Coast State in response for COVID-19 prevention or custom, inspection and quarantine.
* Suspected persons - Persons with obvious COVID-19 symptoms, refer to the IHO.
* Special anchorage area or designated berth place - Special anchor or berth area established by member state and coast state for ship with people suspected COVID-19 and epidemic management requirement, it could be quarantine anchorage and other assigned area.

# Action requested of the Committee

* The committee is invited to review this document, and draw attention of member states if necessary.
* The committee is also invited to consider adding a new output on the development of “VTS Guidelines for Response to Public Health Emergencies” with a view to forwarding it to Council for approval.

1. Input document number, to be assigned by the Committee Secretary [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Leave open if uncertain [↑](#footnote-ref-2)