

## **Guidelines and Protocols for Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 in the BC Commercial Wild Fish Harvest Industry**

(This document has been reviewed and approved by the Province of BC.)

June 2, 2020

### **Introduction**

Commercial fishing, as a supplier of food, has been designated an 'essential service' by both British Columbia and Canada and fishing operators are encouraged to remain in operation to help preserve food security.

The nature of commercial fishing makes it an industry that has a high-risk for COVID-19 virus transmission due to the inability to consistently maintain a 2 metre physical distance between crew or to employ methods such as installing physical barriers and utilizing PPE. If a crew member becomes ill during fishing operations, isolation from other crew members may be challenging and access to healthcare services will not be immediate. While in port, crew have the increased potential of both spreading virus to the community and contracting virus from the community and bringing it back on to the vessel. Therefore, following infection prevention and control measures outlined in this document are vitally important to limiting transmission of COVID-19 between the crew and the communities they come into contact with. Where applicable the information in this document aligns with guidance provided by the Provincial Health Officer (PHO) and BC Center for Disease Control (BCCDC).

### **Overview of Commercial Fishing in BC**

There are currently about 5,600 individuals registered as commercial fishermen in BC and approximately 2,390 registered commercial fishing vessels although not all vessels actively fish each year for a variety of reasons. Half the fleet consists of mosquito vessels less than 11 metres (36 ft) long. Over 93% of the fleet consists of small vessels less than 20 metres (65ft). Most of the rest are under 24.4 metres (80 ft) long with just 2 per cent over that length. These latter vessels are freezer trawlers which process on board as well as harvest fish.

The number of crew in the small boat fleet is usually between two and five people including the skipper. On larger vessels, the crew range from four to six people. In many cases, the crew functions more like a family unit. On the small number of large freezer trawlers, the deck crew runs six to 10 people with the factory crew 10 to 12 people.

Average fishing trip length varies by fishery. It can be anything from three days to 50 days. Whatever the length of the trip, the crew is essentially isolated at sea. All vessels have a home port but deliver fish primarily to Ucluelet, Port Hardy, Prince Rupert and the Lower Mainland.

Every fishing vessel therefore presents a unique operating environment. Vessel size, gear type, fishery fished, time at sea, manning requirements, etc. differ widely. It is therefore the responsibility of every vessel owner and operator to implement safe operating procedures, to the extent reasonable and practical, based upon the guidance received and within the context of vessel and crew realities.

### **Development of COVID-19 Requirements for Commercial Fishing Vessels**

The BC commercial fishery benefits from [Fish Safe](#), the WorkSafeBC designated health and safety association for commercial fishermen. Through a combination of training, outreach and awareness, Fish Safe is ensuring a wealth of COVID-19-related information and resources is being broadly disseminated throughout the industry in a nearly real-time manner.

We recommend that all operators should create their tailored, written protocols based upon the fundamental guidelines and common operating activities that are shared across the industry. The common operating activities include the following:

- Pre-trip preparation
- Fishing operations
- In-port activity
- Post-trip activity

Importantly, key BC fishery associations have already committed significant time and resources to the development of protocols for preventing the spread of COVID-19 in their individual fisheries and have distributed this information broadly to their members, as follows:

- Deep Sea Trawlers Association and Canadian Groundfish Research and Conservation Society – protocols and tools [here](#).
- Underwater Harvesters Association – protocols [here](#).
- Pacific Halibut Management Association – protocols [here](#).
- BC Tuna Fisherman’s Association – protocols [here](#).
- Pacific Prawn Fishermen’s Association – protocols [here](#).

Additionally, UFAWU-Unifor, Native Brotherhood of BC and BC Commercial Fishing Caucus organized a large meeting with over 150 active fishermen from all fisheries who formed the *COVID-19 Active Fishermen’s Committee*. Protocols were created to help reduce the risk for both coastal communities and fishermen and are available [here](#).

What follows is suggested protocols for commercial fishermen across fisheries to implement in their fishing operations based upon the individual characteristics of their vessels, crew and fisheries. These protocols align with PHO orders and guidance and recommendations made by BCCDC and Worksafe BC

where applicable. This protocol is written with the understanding that maintaining a 2 metre distance between crew members at all times is not operationally possible on many fishing vessels.

## **FUNDAMENTAL GUIDELINES - PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF COVID-19**

The following guidelines should serve as a foundation when developing protocols for a specific activity.

Vessel Owners should ensure that the following crew do not come to work:

- Crew who are ill, whether or not the illness has been confirmed as COVID-19.
- Anyone with COVID-19-like symptoms such as a **sore throat, fever, sneezing, or coughing** must self-isolate at home for a minimum of 10 days from onset of symptoms, until their symptoms are completely resolved, and they have been reassessed and approved to return to work.
- Crew who have travelled internationally. In these cases, they must remain away from the workplace for at least 14 days.
- Crew who live in the same household as a confirmed or clinical COVID-19 case who is self-isolating. Or has been exposed to COVID-19.

These guidelines should be followed under all circumstances where ***practical and safe*** to do so:

- **Physically distance** – When outside of your home, at least 2 meters (m) distance between people should be maintained where possible, at all times.
- **Wash hands thoroughly and regularly** – wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer with a minimum 60% alcohol
- If hands are visibly soiled, use a wipe and then hand sanitizer to effectively clean them.
- Do not touch your face, eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Practice coughing etiquette by covering your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue or the crease of your elbow when you sneeze or cough Dispose of the tissue immediately and wash your hands.
- Regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.
- Do not share food, drinks, utensils, etc.
- People who are sick should stay home.
- Masks should be used by people who are symptomatic or in proximity to symptomatic crew.

## **PRE-TRIP PREPARATION – PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF COVID-19**

### **Crew considerations:**

- All crew should participate in a COVID-19 training and education session provided by the employer prior to boarding the vessel. Training should include safety measures and procedures, physical distancing, proper hygiene practices, and monitoring and reporting illness.
- Training and education should be available in both English and the language best suited for the crew. Training can be offered by video or in-person and may include additional written materials. If training is done in person, ensure that people gather in small groups of 5 to 10, and that physical distancing of 2 metres between members can be maintained.
- Educational materials can be found here:
- BCCDC: [About Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\)](#). Fish Safe: [Safe Work Practices: COVID-19 and Fishing Vessels](#)
- Ensure crew know that the following individuals will not be able to work:
  - Anyone with COVID-19-like symptoms such as a **sore throat, fever, sneezing, or coughing** must self-isolate at home for a minimum of 10 days from onset of symptoms, until their symptoms are completely resolved.
  - Workers who have travelled internationally. In these cases, they must remain away from the workplace for at least 14 days.
  - Workers who live in the same household as a confirmed or clinical COVID-19 case who is self-isolating.
- Consider asking crew to self-isolate at home for 14 days before a fishing trip to help prevent the spread.
- Consider asking crew to minimize social contact between fishing trips to help prevent the spread.
- If you are employing foreign crew ensure you are aware of your obligations as the employer to comply with public health requirements in the context of COVID-19. (Resource: Government of Canada: [Temporary Foreign Worker Program – COVID-19](#))
- Ensure crew know how maintaining physical distancing when travelling/commuting to and from the vessel can help prevent the spread.
- Ensure crew know the vessel owner and/or vessel master have protocols in place (in writing) for preventing the spread of COVID-19 on board the vessel that include the following (Resource: WorkSafeBC: [Preventing exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace: A guide for employers](#)):
  - What to do if someone becomes sick during a fishing trip
  - What is required to prevent spread between crew members
  - What is required when physical distancing cannot be maintained
  - What is required to prevent spread between 3<sup>rd</sup> parties including coastal communities
- Ensure crew know the process for expressing concerns about being exposed to COVID-19 while working.
- Safety drills must be practiced prior to fishing but the sharing of survival/immersion suits, PFDs, life jackets, etc. should not be permitted during drills.

- Ensure crew know that it is their right to refuse work if they believe it presents an undue hazard and that WorkSafeBC has a process to address this. (Resource: WorkSafeBC: [COVID-19 and returning to safe operation](#))
- Ensure crew know that 3<sup>rd</sup> parties including coastal communities might have COVID-19 protocols in place governing interaction, access, etc., including essential services. To the extent that these protocols are known before the trip commences, share them with your crew.

## **Increased hygiene and cleaning practices for crew and contractors**

### Increased Hygiene

All workers and contractors must be trained on increased hygiene practices and cleaning. Limiting potential transmission of COVID 19 requires all employers and workers to practice increased hygiene and increased cleaning. Workers must be educated on measures to prevent infection and transmission. Employers must display these good practices while with workers, including diligent hand washing with plain soap and water or use of hand sanitizer with a minimum 60% alcohol.

Employers should support increased hygiene by reminding workers to cough and sneeze into elbows, avoid touching one's face, and dispose of used tissues immediately, and washing hands frequently with plain soap and water or use hand sanitizer with a minimum 60% alcohol.

As part of the daily safety briefing, workers will be reminded of measures to prevent infection and transmission including that frequent handwashing and avoidance of face touching prevents infection transmission.

Additional signage requirements:

- Posters and printed reminders must be displayed in conspicuous places.
- Display posters that illustrate to:
  - cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue or the crease of your elbow when you sneeze or cough;
  - dispose of used tissues immediately;
  - wash your hands; and,
  - avoid touching your face, eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.

Hand hygiene poster: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/reports-publications/COVID-19-handwashing-poster.pdf>

### **Increased Cleaning**

All common areas and surfaces should be cleaned at the start and end of each day and after any potential contamination that may occur throughout the day. Examples of common areas and surfaces include the head or washrooms, galley, common tables, light switches, handrails, controls in the

wheelhouse, and door handles. Regular household cleaners are effective against COVID-19, following the instructions on the label.

- Crew must not share items such as eating utensils, towels, glasses.
- [BCCDC COVID-19 Prevention poster](#)
- [BCCDC Hand hygiene poster](#)
- [BCCDC Cleaning and Disinfectants for Common Areas](#)

#### **Preventing transmission between Subcontractor(s) and Crew:**

- Log all sub-contractors that board the vessel, date time and location of boarding and duration on the vessel.
- Communicate to all sub-contractors the requirement to complete health screening prior to boarding the vessel and the need to minimize interactions with the crew.
- Communicate that all subcontractors will be required to wear a facemask while on the vessel and will need to wash or sanitize hands before and after leaving the vessel.
- Do not allow subcontractors who are ill or show symptoms of COVID-19 to board the vessel or interact with crew.
- Minimize crew contact with subcontractors who board the vessel before fishing.
- Ensure cleaning and sanitization of all surfaces after a subcontractor leaves the vessel.

#### **Vessel and gear considerations:**

- Identify all areas on the vessel that will make it difficult or impossible to maintain a 2 m physical distance.
- Consider ways to maximize physical distancing in sleeping accommodations. If physical distancing is not possible, curtains may be hung around sleeping units to help decrease spread of droplets while sleeping.
- Consider ways to safely reorganize workspaces and common areas to facilitate physical distancing.
- Where possible designate tools to individual crew members. Tools and equipment that must be shared should be washed and sanitized at the beginning and end of each work day.
- Safety drills must be practiced prior to fishing but the sharing of survival/immersion suits, PFDs, life jackets, etc. should not be permitted during drills. Wherever possible safety equipment should be made available and labeled for each crew member.

#### **Galley and eating arrangements:**

- Organize galleys to enable physical distancing as much as possible. Stagger crew meal times and breaks to maximize physical distancing. Crew must wash their hands prior to any meal preparation. Post signs to encourage hand hygiene before and after meals using the [BCCDC's Signage and Posters](#).
- Designate each crew member their own plates and utensils. Ensure shared cooking supplies such as salt and pepper shakers, condiment bottles and jars, etc. are kept clean and wiped down and sanitized after meals.

- Shared areas (kitchen & bathroom counters, handles and control switches) should be disinfected after each use.
- Meals should be delivered to the outside of rooms or curtained beds of any workers that are in isolation.

#### **Food and Provisioning considerations:**

- Provision supplies for enough days to minimize the need for shore side support during trips.
- If food or supplies are required during trips, ensure community COVID-19 docking rules are understood and only one crew member leaves the vessel to purchase supplies to minimize community interactions.

#### **Hygiene, cleaning and personal protective equipment (PPE) considerations:**

- The use of PPE can provide a level of protection for transmission of COVID-19, however it must be used correctly and will not be effective in all circumstances. Due to the nature of commercial fishing, PPE may only be useful during non-working hours, while in the cabin and onloading or off loading at the dock or during short outings or errands in docking communities. Crew should be aware of when and how to best use PPE (Resource: BCCDC: [Masks](#). Fish Safe: [Respiratory Protection \(Face Mask\) Resources](#))

Gloves used for work (rubber fishing gloves with cotton liner) gloves should be designated to each worker and washed as often as hands. Read Fish Safe: [Enhanced Surface Cleaning and Disinfecting Information Sheet](#), and implement suggested cleaning and disinfecting practices on the vessel.

- Ensure an adequate supply cleaners and disinfectants are available on board to last the duration of the trip.
- Ensure adequate supplies of PPE such as face masks, gloves, and eye protection are available for all crew to last the duration of the trip.
- Consider how the use of face masks can prevent the spread but have limitations.

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### **FISHING OPERATIONS – PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF COVID-19**

#### **Assessing crew health prior to boarding the vessel:**

- Ensure all crew and contractors are assessed prior to boarding the vessel
- Crew or contractors who have indicated symptoms of COVID-19 should not board the vessel.
- Ensure crew and contractors know their obligations to monitor for symptoms and to report symptoms that include common cold, influenza, or gastrointestinal symptoms.
- Crew must be educated on how to self-assess their symptoms

#### **Monitoring crew health daily:**

- Monitor workers daily for COVID-19 like symptoms.
- The online BC COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool should be printed and provided to all crew members and contractors.



- Crew members should complete this assessment daily themselves.
- Advise crew and contractors to report symptoms immediately and self-isolate.

#### **If someone develops COVID-19-like symptoms:**

- Crew members who have common cold or influenza like illness or symptoms compatible with COVID-19 are required to put on a face mask, isolate themselves and immediately report symptoms.
- Crew members who develop COVID-19 like symptoms should be removed from the vessel as soon as possible.
- Self-isolation should continue for a period determined in consultation with their medical provider.
- In all cases, isolation must continue until a fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medications (e.g. Tylenol, Advil), AND symptoms improve (e.g. improvement in runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fatigue).
- Depending on location and/or distance from shore consider getting medical advice via an online self-assessment tool, HealthLinkBC (8-1-1), etc. (Resources: HealthLinkBC: [BC COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool](#), BCCDC: [If you are sick](#)).
- If symptoms progress and become serious contact the Coast Guard.
- **Transport Canada** has provided guidance if a crewmember displays an illness symptomatic of COVID-19 or an infectious disease, as follows (Resource: Transport Canada: [Special Marine Security Notification #2020-007](#)):
  - When alongside, either prior to departure or after arrival: Vessel operators ***should inform*** the responsible provincial or local health authorities and the vessel's agent.
  - During a voyage: Vessel operators ***should advise*** the responsible provincial or local health authorities as well as appropriate service providers (dependent on location and nature of the vessel's work, which may include marine communications and traffic services, pilotage authorities, port authority, and marine facility operators).
- Ensure safe transportation of the sick crewmember to their home or medical facility.
- Clean and disinfect any areas/rooms a symptomatic crewmember has been in.

#### **WHEN IN PORT OR ON ANCHOR – PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF COVID-19**

##### **COMMUNITY CONTACT: FISHERMEN-COMMUNITY INTERACTION PROTOCOLS**

The Protocol below is the minimum that fish harvesters should follow. Each different community may have additional or particular measures to follow and all vessels must abide by these measures in addition to the protocols below.

#### **General rules:**

- Individual coastal communities may have explicit COVID-19 Protocols in place governing such things as designated itinerant commercial fishermen tie up floats; anchoring requirements; community access and contact; requirements for phone in service for groceries, parts and

laundry; and distancing protocols for service providers etc. Contact the community's harbour master, small craft harbour authority, or band council for specific guidance and respect those instructions fully.

- Safely anchoring out away from the dock can reduce the number of individuals not part of your crew from crossing over your vessel and protects others from contact with your crew. If a vessel ties up beside you at a dock, remain inside your vessel until they have tied up and finished on deck. If you have to move, communicate that to the boats tied up around you and determine who is going to untie so that the fewest people are engaged in the activity.
- Limit interactions with crew from other vessels; limit rafting unless necessary for safety.
- Restrict access to the vessel unless absolutely necessary and log any visitors or service providers who come onto the vessel. Cleaning and disinfecting of contacted surfaces should occur immediately upon completion of these activities.
- All fishermen should remain on their own vessel when in port and should not go visiting on another vessel (unless they are in your family 'bubble'), on the dock or into the community except that:
  - a) During extended periods between fishing trips when the vessel is not in home port, if a community permits fish harvesters to leave their vessels to socialize with other crew on the dock, then physical distancing (2 metres) practices should be strictly adhered to and hands should be frequently washed with soap and water. Because of inside space issues, fish harvesters should stay out of cabins and socialize outside, only.
  - b) If it is a crew member's home port, they can go home but should practice strict physical distancing and good COVID-19 hygiene and follow all current guidance from the BCCDC to prevent bringing the virus back onto the vessel.
  - c) If the extended stay between fishing trips is longer than 2 days, and the community is permitting, fish harvesters may go into the community for social events such as eating with their crew but they must practice physical distancing, good COVID-19 hygiene and follow any other guidance from the BCCDC.
- If fishermen are permitted to enter a community for groceries, laundry, fueling or garbage removal, or for social reasons like eating in a restaurant, they should wear a mask for courtesy purposes. If a fisherman is ill, all members of the vessel should wear a mask when assisting the crew member for medical attention.
- Service providers (such as mechanics, electronics specialists etc.) may have their own protocols. If they are more restrictive, respect them, if they are less restrictive, follow the ones that pertain to your vessel.

- Ensure all crew are instructed in any and all community protocols or 3<sup>rd</sup> party service provider protocols

#### **Food and Provisioning considerations:**

- Provision supplies for enough days to minimize the need for shore side support during trips.
- If provisions have to be bought during a trip, abide by the community's protocols. To protect your crew, minimize community contact and have groceries and parts delivered.
- Consider having groceries delivered to the vessel if the service is available.
- If there is no delivery service available, in order to protect the crew, and to reduce contact with the community, send one crew person to shop who should walk to and from the store if possible and have the groceries delivered.
- Traveling to a grocery store or other necessary public establishment should be limited to one person per crew who will also buy food and essentials for others.
- Post signage and reminders for crew to regularly wash hands, practice coughing etiquette, maintain physical distancing in the community and avoid congregating in social settings or community settings.

#### **Fuel and Water:**

- Follow instructions of the fuel and water providers (fuel station, wharfinger, fish plant etc.)

#### **Showers and Washroom facilities:**

- Follow the instructions of the shower/washroom facility provider.
- Clean the shower and washroom before and after use with sanitizer provided by the facility or use your vessel's. Make sure hands are washed before leaving the facility.

#### **Laundry:**

- If clothes need to be laundered away from home, best practices are to use a laundry service to pick up, wash, and return the laundry. If no such laundry service is available, one crew member should do the laundry to minimize community contact. They should practice physical distancing, practice good COVID-19 hygiene and take sanitization wipes along to sanitize any surfaces before and after contact. Any community protocols must be followed.

#### **Offloading seafood:**

- Limiting interaction with 3<sup>rd</sup> party service providers like offloaders can help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Processors, buyers and offloaders will have their own non-contact protocols such as fishermen staying in the cabin while unloaders are on the fishing vessel; fishermen must abide by them.
- If fishermen unload their own vessel, they must wear clean gloves; hands should be washed immediately prior to putting the gloves on.
- The deck should be scrubbed down and sanitized after the unloading process, especially if offloaders worked on the vessel.

## **Garbage Removal**

Proper collection and removal of garbage is crucial to reducing the risk of disease transmission. This includes wearing disposable gloves to remove waste from the vessel and using sturdy, leak resistant garbage bags for containing waste.

- Ensure there are sturdy, leak resistant garbage bags. If a garbage bag is punctured or contaminated, it should be placed into a second bag
  - Garbage should be bagged and properly stored on the vessel. Garbage should be removed only to the proper receptacles as directed by communities.
  - The crew member handling garbage should wear disposable gloves. Ensure anyone handling waste removes gloves and performs hand hygiene immediately after handling and disposing of waste.
  - Physical distancing must be maintained during all operations especially when interacting with external 3<sup>rd</sup> parties.
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## **Important Information Regarding First Nations and First Nations Health Centres**

Indigenous populations face heightened health risks due to lower health outcomes compared with non-Indigenous Canadians. First Nations, Métis, and Inuit populations disproportionately face health disparities linked to the social determinants of health (i.e. social, economic, cultural, political inequities). As such, all workers must respect any precautions being taken to avoid carrying this virus into First Nations communities.

- Vessels that are travelling to or near a First Nations community, should connect with regional health authorities to be advised of any current precautions being taken in the region.
  - If a crew member who is symptomatic wishes to return to their home in a First Nation community, the First Nation health centre should be notified to determine that sufficient resources are in place to support isolation of the individual on arrival.
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## **POST-TRIP – PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF COVID-19**

- Thoroughly clean and disinfect your vessel.
- Review your written plan and its protocols and procedures and discuss with your crew – what worked, what didn't and what changes need to be made.