



# The Australasian Marine Pilots Institute

## **Covid-19 advice to AMPI Members 28<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

Dear Members,

We have all been inundated with COVID19 communications from all manner of sources in the last few weeks. There has also been no shortage of generic advice from health departments across Australia.

As each State, employer and jurisdiction come up with a plethora of COVID19 responses, AMPI thought that it was time that some targeted and practical advice to Marine Pilots was produced, to help Marine Pilots on an individual level understand the basics of viral transmission in the pilotage environment, and how best to protect themselves from infection.

The attached document has been written by one of our member marine pilots in consultation with a Master Mariner who also holds a microbiology degree. It has been medically corroborated by an occupational physician (Dr Maurice Harden) and endorsed by a triage nurse currently working on the COVID19 frontline.

Without wanting to delve too deeply into medical and microbiological science, the information is designed to shine some light on the fundamentals of viral transmission and debunk some widely held misconceptions. There is no doubt this virus is highly transmittable but with sensible precautions we can prevent ourselves becoming infected and more importantly, prevent further transmission.

Captain Peter Dann  
President  
Australasian Marine Pilots Institute

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*AMPI operates as a not for profit organisation, run by volunteering Marine Pilots from around Australia, serving the professional interests of Marine Pilots in the Australasian region.*

*New members and associate members are most welcome to join our organisation.*

*The AMPI Executive and Board remind all that any official guidance from Australian Federal Government, ABF or State Government should supersede this advice, this advice is intended to be used as a supplement or guide as it directly relates to our unique profession. Please stay safe on and off the water.*

*For further information please contact [president@ampi.org.au](mailto:president@ampi.org.au) or your regional AMPI Director.*

**AMPI reference : AMPI Covid-19 advice - 1.1**  
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## How To Avoid Catching COVID19 whilst Piloting

Marine Pilots pick up bacterial and viral infections on ships all the time, and have for millennia. The seasonal influenza travels from the northern hemisphere every year, in part due to infections picked up on board ships.

The current risk of infection from COVID19 for a Marine Pilot is quite different from other workers in frontline border or medical professions. Vessels are often many days from their last foreign port call and have made specific medical declarations prior to arrival. This doesn't mean that they are guaranteed to be COVID19 free, but the chances are far lower than you would find in say, an international airport.

The risks that we as Marine Pilots have to contend with come from a carrier who has infected bridge surfaces and equipment, or passes the infection directly to you via a handshake or cough. These risks are relatively easily mitigated.

## Virus Transmission

Bacteria and viruses are transmitted from person to person via a number of methods.

- **direct (blood/saliva/bodily fluids)**
- **aerial (airborne virus)**
- **physical**
- **droplet**

The first two methods are irrelevant for the pilotage environment. **Direct** transmission would occur from say, sharing an intravenous needle, kissing or sexual contact. COVID19 is not an **airborne** virus so you can't catch it by simply breathing.

The more common methods of transmission, and the ways you as a Marine Pilot are likely to catch a virus, are by the last two; **physical** and **droplet**.

## Virus Viability Outside the Body

The good news for us is that viruses don't survive very well out in the wild, they need a host (ie you) to survive and multiply. To get from person to person in normal pilotage interactions (as opposed to direct blood, saliva, sexual or airborne transmission) the virus has to be expelled by the carrier through a cough, sneeze, spit or even speaking/shouting.

The virus is now out and about for as long as it can survive, usually a matter of hours or minutes (depending on a number of variables)\*. The virus is protected by the mucus surrounding it, as well as a viral envelope called a capsid.

Medical advice suggests COVID19 can be detected outside the body for up to three days\* but this would require absolute ideal conditions. Also, being detectable is not the same as being infectious. The longer a virus is without a host, the weaker it becomes. A



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2011 study\*\* carried out in the UK concluded that the Influenza A(H1N1) virus was no longer viable from between 4 to 9 hours depending on the surface it was left on.

The harsh marine environment is nowhere near ideal for virus viability. Salt air and sunlight in particular weaken a virus out in the open. Hard, non-porous surfaces (stainless steel) are better for virus viability. Porous surfaces less so. Human skin, particularly on the hands is actually a very good at repelling and killing viruses due to its pH, porous nature and the anti-microbial bacteria that lives there. The fact remains, viruses will die fairly quickly without a host and the trick is not to become one.

For you to become infected, the virus needs an entry path into your body. As COVID19 is not airborne, you don't catch it simply by breathing 'infected air'.

The skin is an excellent barrier to infection, so the virus needs a moist membrane like the mouth, tongue, nose, eyes or a cut/graze to get in. Unless the transmitting person has sneezed directly into your face, the easiest and most likely way you'll become infected is if you do it yourself. That is, most people will touch their face, mouth, nose and eyes multiple times an hour. If the virus is on your hands, it will get in and do what viruses do best – multiply.

## Habits

As an example, medical laboratory technicians use a number of techniques to prevent themselves catching infections, or compromising the materials they work with. Cleanliness, meticulous personal habits and PPE are their bread and butter. Lab technicians are as studious about not touching their face as we are about watching the helm indicator.

Get into the habit of not touching anything unless you absolutely must. Allow the crew to open the bridge door, don't shake hands with the Captain, use your own radio, don't hug the compass repeater, let the Master use his/her own pen, ask the crew to set the radar to your liking.

If you have been issued with alcohol surface wipes, a good technique may be to wipe down a small area where you intend to work from. Wipe down chair arms, the compass repeater, VHF hand-piece and a small area of working surface for your paperwork, then stay there. You can of course move around the bridge, but be mindful not to touch anything unless necessary. In terms of potentially infectious surfaces, an open bridge wing is far less dangerous than say, an internal steel door handle, due to it's exposure to sun and salt air.

These are just some examples of habits you can cultivate to lessen your hand contact with potentially infected surfaces.

## Cleanliness

We are all being told to wash our hands. Slopping on copious amounts of alcohol gel is not recommended and may even lead to a false sense of security. If you swabbed the freshly-washed hands of an untrained person you would find a multitude of surviving bacteria. Thumbs in particular are often not as clean as they could be so be particular



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about getting the front and back of your hands, particularly your thumbs, thoroughly scrubbed. A surgeon will scrub their hands for several minutes before moving on to finger nails, wrists, forearms, and after all that they wear gloves as well. We don't need to go that far, but be aware, the normal quick hand wash is probably inadequate. Use soap, wash for a good 30 seconds and dry with a paper towel.

Alcohol hand sanitiser is not a substitute for good hand washing. There is absolutely no point in smearing gel over the top of dirt which can protect the virus from the sanitising properties of the gel. Once the gel has worn off, the virus will still be on your hands. In addition, alcohol gel can reduce the naturally occurring anti-microbial bacteria (good bacteria) living on your skin, adversely affecting your natural defences.

## **Masks, Gloves and PPE**

If you don't stick your fingers in your mouth, chances are you don't really need additional PPE. We are not dealing with an infectious hospital ward-type situation. We are trying not to pick up an infection from a surface that has been contaminated by someone who may not even know they have one, in an environment that is less than ideal for a virus to survive outside the body.

There are two main types of masks being disseminated by employers. N95 P2 masks and general surgical masks. Neither are particularly good in a situation where an infected person is coughing and sneezing prolifically in your direction, but are probably fine for pilotage.

The P2 mask has an exhalation vent which makes it comfortable to wear, as hot breath doesn't build up inside the mask. However, if you are a carrier, then it is possible for droplets to escape through the vent, making it a bit useless for preventing you infecting others.

The surgical mask is less comfortable due to the lack of exhaust vent but is quite good at catching your own spittle. On the flip-side, it is not great for preventing droplets arriving in your mouth or nose due to the lack of a good seal around the sides.

The ideal arrangement during pilotage would be for the crew to wear surgical masks and you the P2 mask.

Gloves will prevent you from getting the virus directly on to your hands. This is fine right up until the point where you scratch your nose. If you choose to wear gloves you have to exercise the same meticulous habits as you would without them. Use them only once and remove them by peeling them off from the wrist leaving them inside out. Then wash your hands.

Other PPE being talked about is disposable coveralls and eye protection. Again, in the pilotage environment, both are probably not required unless you are dealing with profusely spluttering bridge crew. If that's the case, other safety measures have already failed, and the advice would be to decline the pilotage and leave.



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## Food and Drink

The best advice is to not eat or drink anything provided by the crew onboard ship. The risk is probably not in the food itself, but more likely from the handling of the plates, tray and cutlery. The same goes for bottled water, ie the bottle could conceivably have the virus on the outside. If you carry your own water, keep it inside your bag. The bottle needs to have a flip top lid or screw cap, that allows the drinking nozzle to be accessed and closed without you touching it.

Whichever way you look at it, food is problematic, even if you carry your own. You have to assume that the virus is on your hands whilst getting the food unwrapped and into your mouth safely. The best advice is to not eat onboard at all. This may require a change to way you prepare for work, the hours you work, or the number of pilotages you conduct consecutively.

## Post Pilotage

The pilot launch is potentially a space where further transmission can occur. Door handles, arm rests, radios and keyboards should be disinfected between pilot transfers.

Once back at the Pilot Station, wash your hands. Again, chairs, keyboards and other common user equipment should be cleaned between uses. Leave as much work clothing you can at work. Once at home, wash your hands and don't sit around in your work clothes.

## In Summation

The above is by no means exhaustive but should be taken as practical advice to minimise the likelihood of picking up COVID19, or any other virus whilst piloting.

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## References

\* Professor Deenan Pillay, Virologist, University College London  
<https://www.theguardian.com/science/audio/2020/mar/24/covid-19-how-long-can-it-survive-outside-the-body>

\*\*Survival of Influenza A(H1N1) on Materials Found in Households: Implications for Infection Control. Dr J Greatorex et al.

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