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1 September 2021

To All Shipping Agents/ Companies in Hong Kong,

Prevention against Importation of COVID-19 Cases to Hong Kong through Visiting Goods Vessels

We write to express our concerns on the recent confirmed COVID-19 cases on board goods vessels calling the Hong Kong port, and appeal to shipping agents and companies the importance of strict compliance with the relevant laws and exemption conditions in order to prevent the importation of COVID-19 cases to Hong Kong.

Recently, a relatively massive number of positive cases were found on board two ocean-going vessels, namely the “**MV Asia Energy**” which entered Hong Kong waters on 8 August 2021; and the “**MV Thor Monadic**” which arrived at Hong Kong on 24 August 2021. In these two cases, there were an alarming number of confirmed cases found on board, including 15 positive cases, all carrying the L452R mutant strain, found on board MV Thor Monadic so far. According to the Department of Health (DH), the two ships were reported normal when the agents/companies concerned submitted the free pratique application, but confirmed cases with serious symptoms were found on board immediately after the ships entered Hong Kong waters. The two cases are now being investigated by the law enforcement authorities on suspected provision of false information / misrepresentation.

Pursuant to Cap. 599A, if the operator of a cross-boundary vessel has reason to suspect that there exists on board the vessel a case or source of a specified infectious diseases; or a case or source of contamination, the operator concerned should notify a health officer immediately. A person who contravenes the above commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine at level 3 and to imprisonment for 6 months.

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We therefore appeal to shipping agents/ companies the importance of strict compliance with the relevant laws and exemption conditions in order to prevent the importation of COVID-19 cases to Hong Kong. In particular, **all ship agents should verify the information provided by the shipping companies and the ship masters before submitting applications to the DH for free pratique.** The ship agents will be held liable in case any misrepresentation / provision of false information is substantiated.

Shipping agents/ companies are also reminded to strictly comply with the exemption conditions applicable to crew members of (a) goods vessels with cargo operations in Hong Kong (at **Annex A**) and (b) goods vessels which have not called the ports of “Group A specified places” under Cap. 599H during the 21 days prior to arrival in Hong Kong purely for shipping services (excluding ship repair) (at **Annex B**). Shipping companies/agents failing to comply with the relevant exemption conditions, or failing to ensure that the goods vessels will only take ship services provided by the ship services companies which have complied with the relevant conditions, will be **disallowed for arranging goods vessels to visit Hong Kong for crew change and/or shipping services for one month.** The Marine Department (MD) will continue to conduct spot checks to ensure that the aforementioned conditions and requirements have been complied with.

The global situation of COVID-19 infection remains severe and there is a continuous increase in the number of cases involving mutant strains that carry higher transmissibility. While the Government and the local shipping and port sectors have made continuous efforts in minimising the risks of importation of COVID-19 cases to Hong Kong, we strongly appeal for your cooperation and support in implementing the Government’s anti-epidemic measures.

Yours faithfully,



(K.T. POON)

for Director of Marine

Annex.

- A. Exemption Conditions Applicable to Crew Change for Goods Vessels with Cargo Operation
- B. Exemption Conditions Applicable to Goods Vessels Visiting Hong Kong Purely for Shipping Services (viz. bunkering, reprovisioning of necessities and switching of shipping documents, etc.)

c.c.

Transport and Housing Bureau
Food and Health Bureau
Department of Health

**Exemption Conditions Applicable to Crew Change
for Goods Vessels with Cargo Operation**

**Crew Change Arrangement Concerning Vessels which have called the
ports of “Group A Specified Places” under Cap. 599H**

No crew change (including sign-on and sign-off crew) is permitted for goods vessels which have called the ports of high risk places specified in Group A under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H) during the 21 days prior to arrival in Hong Kong. These vessels will be allowed to enter Hong Kong for cargo operation without crew change. All crew members should remain on-board the vessels during the stay of the vessels in Hong Kong waters and should not get ashore.

**Crew Change Arrangement Concerning Vessels which have called the
ports of Places other than “Group A Specified Places” under Cap. 599H**

For goods vessels with cargo operation which have not called the ports of “Group A specified places” under Cap. 599H during the 21 days prior to arrival in Hong Kong and intend to conduct crew change, the following conditions will apply:

1. Shipping companies/agents shall submit the Estimated Time of Arrival (ETA) and Estimated Time of Departure (ETD) of vessel together with the details of the sign-on and sign-off crew to be changed (including their names and flight schedules) 72 hours prior arrival of the vessel for the Marine Department (MarDep)’s approval. For out-going crew members of goods vessels which have called the ports of any country outside China during the 14 days prior to arrival in Hong Kong (and have not called the ports of Group A specified places during the 21 days prior to arrival in Hong Kong), shipping companies/agents should declare in its crew change application how would the out-going crew member concerned take the SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test according to the means as mentioned in clause 8 below. In the crew change application, ship companies/agents should also indicate the out-going sea crew who is a Hong Kong resident and will stay in Hong Kong after signing off. Ship companies/agents should indicate in the crew change application whether the vessels have called the ports of any “Group A Specified Places” under Cap. 599H during the 21

days prior to arrival in Hong Kong. The crew change application should be submitted to both MarDep and the Department of Health (DH) by email –

MarDep: *pmovtc1@mardep.gov.hk*

DH: *pa_rp@dh.gov.hk*

2. All crew members should remain on-board the vessels during the stay of the vessels in Hong Kong waters and should not get ashore.

3. Point-to-point transfers should be arranged by the shipping companies/agents for crew members to and from the vessel. Use of public transport including MTR, airport shuttle train and taxi for crew transfer is prohibited. Crew members should wear masks during the entire journey to and from the vessel.

Sign-on Crew

4. Signing-on crew members should only arrive Hong Kong when their vessels are berthed in Hong Kong and should get onboard immediately upon arrival.

5. Signing-on crew members arriving Hong Kong at the Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) to sign-on goods vessels must have a negative result of polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid test at an ISO 15189-accredited laboratory or a laboratory recognised by the Government where the laboratory is located with the specimen collected within 48 hours prior to boarding the flight to Hong Kong. All signing-on crew members must take a post-arrival SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test at the DH's Temporary Specimen Collection Centre upon arrival at HKIA and wait for the results there or any other location as designated by DH ("test and hold"). Upon arrival, they must only use the designated channel within the HKIA to arrive at the designate pick-up point. They should wear masks during the entire journey from the HKIA to the vessel.

6. Shipping companies/agents should declare on a letter of certification that the signing-on crew member concerned has been tested negative for SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid with the specimen collected within 48 hours prior to boarding the flight to Hong Kong (as mentioned in clause 5). The letter should also include an emergency local contact phone number for prompt contact with the concerned crew under emergency situation.

7. Signing-on crew members are required to present MarDep's approval letter (as mentioned in clause 1), the negative test report (as

mentioned in clause 5) and letter of certification (as mentioned in clause 6) to staff of DH when he/she enters Hong Kong at HKIA. The shipping companies/agents should prepare at least one copy of the certification letter to be carried by each crew when arriving Hong Kong for submission to DH staff. Crew members who fail to present and submit the abovementioned documents to DH staff will be denied entry, and the shipping companies/agents concerned are required to arrange these crew members to fly back to their originating country(ies) forthwith.

Sign-off Crew

8. Signing-off crew members who have completed their service on-board will be required to stay onboard the vessel during their stay in Hong Kong and travel directly for repatriation to their home countries so as to minimise contact with the local community. For goods vessels which have called the ports of any country outside China during the 14 days prior to arrival in Hong Kong (and have not called the ports of Group A specified places during the 21 days prior to arrival in Hong Kong), ship companies/agents are required to **EITHER** –

- (a) arrange a SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test for the signing-off sea crew at an ISO 15189-accredited laboratory or a laboratory recognised by the Government where the laboratory is located with the specimen collected within 72 hours prior to the vessel's ETA at Hong Kong and obtain a negative result; **OR**
- (b) arrange the signing-off sea crew to take a polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid test for COVID-19 by one of the recognised testing institutions in Hong Kong upon the vessel's arrival, and these crew members will need to stay on board his/her cargo vessel until the result (negative) is available [i.e. test-and-hold arrangement on board the vessel in Hong Kong].

9. Signing-off crew who are Hong Kong residents and who will stay in Hong Kong after signing off are required to take a polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid test for COVID-19 as in clause 8(b) above. They are not exempted from compulsory quarantine, and are subject to the prevailing quarantine arrangement as with other non-exempted persons. These signing-off Hong Kong crew must use land transportation designated by the Government to the designated quarantine hotels direct from the location where they go ashore. Shipping companies/agents will be provided with a list of land transportation designated by the Government

for their direct contact to make land transportation arrangement to designated quarantine hotels.

General

10. Shipping companies/agents should keep and if requested provide information on the testing, transportation and logistics arrangement of the crew members (such as details of the flights taken by the crew concerned, licence plate number and driver details of the vehicles, name of ferry and coxswain details used to transfer the crew members, exact time and location of the picking up/setting down of the transfers, laboratory reports, etc.) for ease of contact tracing.

11. Shipping companies/agents must report to the MarDep immediately upon receipt of information of any COVID-19 positive cases of their seafarers.

12. Shipping companies/agents failing to comply with the above conditions and/or provide the required information will be denied future crew change for one month.

Annex B

Exemption Conditions Applicable to Goods Vessels Visiting Hong Kong Purely for Shipping Services (viz. bunkering, reprovisioning of necessities and switching of shipping documents, etc.)

Sea crew onboard goods vessels which have called the ports of high risk places specified in Group A under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H) during the 21 days prior to arrival in Hong Kong purely for shipping services are not exempted from compulsory quarantine arrangement.

For goods vessels which **HAVE NOT called the ports of “Group A specified places” under Cap. 599H** during the 21 days prior to arrival in Hong Kong purely for shipping services, the following conditions will apply:

1. **Application submission:** ship agents or shipping companies of the vessels are required to state in their Pre-arrival Notification (PAN) the purposes of entering Hong Kong waters (i.e. to receive bunkering, reprovisioning and/or other shipping services) and submit to MD at least 24 hours prior to their arrival.
2. **No change in sea crew nor landing of sea crew onshore:**
 - (i) for goods vessels entering Hong Kong purely for bunkering/reprovisioning, they will be required to berth at anchorage areas designated by MD at all times during their stay in Hong Kong;
 - (ii) all sea crew of these goods vessels will be required to stay onboard at all times when the ship remains in Hong Kong. No crew change is allowed.
3. **Precautionary measures:** while local workers do not need to go onboard the goods vessels for provision of bunker/reprovisioning services or for switching of documents, in the unlikely event that individual local worker(s), for some special reasons, need to perform duty onboard, they should take all the precautionary measures (such as

wearing personal protection equipment at all times, and regular checking of body temperature). Signing / exchange of documents should be handled by e-mail transmission as far as possible, or through a carrying basket and/or disposable plastic bags transferring between the supply barge and the goods vessel following health precautionary protocol as considered by the health authorities.

4. **Regular COVID-19 Testing:** shipping services companies should arrange frontline staff of the respective ship services trade who would need to work on the launch boats and may have contacts with sea crew onboard ocean going vessels or river trade vessels during their course of operation to take regular COVID-19 tests (on a 14-day interval). The shipping services companies should also keep a full record of staff undergoing COVID-19 testing for necessary checking.

5. **COVID-19 Vaccination:** shipping services companies should deploy workers who have completed COVID-19 vaccination (i.e. 14 days after receiving two doses of vaccine) (unless contraindicated) to conduct relevant services involving physical contact with goods vessels as far as possible. Local workers who could not be vaccinated for medical reasons should be certified by a medical practitioner as unfit for vaccination, and should be subject to frequent testing (say at least once every 7 days) as considered by the health authorities.

6. **Penalties:** ship agents are required to ensure that the goods vessels will only take ship services provided by the ship services companies which have complied with the above conditions. If a goods vessel (or the sea crew on board) or ship agent fails to comply with the aforesaid conditions, MD may disallow the ship agent from arranging goods vessels to visit Hong Kong for bunker and other ship services for one month.