

COVID-19 CONTINGENCY PLANNING GUIDE FOR USGS LARGE VESSEL OPERATIONS

PURPOSE: This guide provides prevention and mitigation procedures for USGS large vessel, mission essential/critical operations and designated mission essential/critical employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. This guide is not meant for normal field activities and should only be used for fieldwork with the designation of mission essential/critical operations and after all DOI/USGS mitigation strategies have been exhausted. **The designation of mission essential/critical fieldwork and employees is determined by USGS Management Regional Directors/Associate Directors.** All mission essential/critical employees assigned field work on large vessels will be referred to as “crewmembers” in this guide. Large vessels are defined as an USGS owned vessel with length overall 26ft and greater.

This guide draws on information provided by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) COVID-19 website](#), [Department of the Interior \(DOI\) COVID-19 website](#), the [USGS COVID-19 Managers & Supervisors Portal](#) and other sources to assist USGS Management and large vessel crewmembers in developing and implementing a contingency plan to protect the workforce while ensuring continuity of mission essential/critical operations during the ongoing outbreak of the respiratory disease “Coronavirus Disease 2019,” or COVID-19.

DEVELOPING A COVID-19 CONTINGENCY PLAN

Prevention Strategies for Management and Essential/Critical Employees (Crewmembers)

- **Prevention strategies are an important aspect of reducing exposure to COVID-19 during large vessel cruises:**
 - o The intent of this guidance for prevention is to screen out potential high risk or exposed COVID-19 crewmembers prior to being assigned to large vessel mission essential/critical operations. In addition, regular monitoring health status, PPE requirements, social distancing requirements, and disinfecting and cleaning of areas have been incorporated. It is important that crewmembers commit to the Prevention and Mitigation strategies in this field guide. The health of the crew depends on the health of each crewmember. The note below gives the guidance documents for latest fieldwork guidance/checklist and should be used along with this large vessel planning guide for pre-screening crewmembers.

Note: see above link for USGS COVID-19 SharePoint portal to access latest versions of the “Field Travel Guidance”, “Field Travel Checklist”, and “Appendix 1 USGS Close Quarters Safety Guidance” for requirements and regulations on COVID-19 related symptoms/high risk COVID-19 guidance, pre-cruise (field work) checklist, and PPE use for conducting field work.

- **Advise crewmembers to consider COVID-19 risks and self-identify with supervisor to prevent assignment to large vessel duties if they are at higher risk for severe illnesses:**
 - o Reference the “Field Travel Guidance” checklist for determining high risk to self-identify for susceptibility to COVID- 19.
- **Advise crewmember to consider COVID-19 risks when conducting business, personal time, or personal travel. There is an emphasis on each crewmember to report to the vessel for a cruise as healthy as possible:**

- Advise crewmember to defer nonessential travel 14 days prior to cruise.
- Advise crewmember to check themselves for symptoms, including temperature checks, of COVID-19 daily 14 days prior/after the cruise and notify their supervisor and stay home if they are experiencing the COVID-19 symptoms. Crewmembers are encouraged to use tracking apps or other means to keep track of their checks and temperatures. Reference the “Field Travel Guidance” for the latest symptoms of COVID-19.
- Advise crewmembers to practice social distancing while off duty to minimize exposure to COVID-19 virus.
- Advise crewmembers to follow all local and state guidelines for COVID-19 response actions.
- **Require crewmembers to monitor their health and report to large vessel fit for duty and continue to monitor their health each workday during the cruise:**
 - Prior to daily operations for each cruise all crewmembers will re-certify the “Field Travel Checklist” questions. Reference the checklist question for exhibiting COVID-19 “symptoms”, also the Crewmembers will record their temperature and report if their temperature is (100.4 F/37.8 C or above) as a potential symptom of COVID-19. Reference DOI/EEOC COVID-19 websites for guidance on requiring medical information during a pandemic. Crewmembers should immediately self-report any symptoms of COVID-19 during large vessel operations.
 - The reporting of cases and symptoms of COVID-19 immediately to supervisor is required to determine appropriate actions to prevent and mitigate the spread of COVID-19. If vessel is underway immediately isolate the crewmember with COVID-19 symptoms, use PPE per “Field Travel Guide,” trace where the symptomatic crewmember had been and who they had been in contact with, notify contact personnel and isolate, and return to port to disembark the crewmember and clean/disinfect affected spaces.
 - Systemic and suspected contact crewmembers should contact their personnel physician or local health department for testing and health treatment. Results shall be shared with the Supervisor. Covid-19 reported incidents shall be logged by the Supervisor in the USGS COVID-19 Risk Assessment and Incident Report (SharePoint site). Any confirmed work-related and confirmed COVID-19 incidents (professional medical confirmation) shall also be reported in the Safety Management Information System (SMIS).
- **Take steps to minimize essential employees’ exposure when traveling to, from, and during vessel operations:**
 - If possible, facilitate crewmember travel by car as opposed to plane, bus, or train. Try to use one vehicle per person if possible. If you must travel together, separate as much as possible, keep windows open if possible and clean and disinfect commonly touched areas. Strongly encourage crewmembers to use cloth face coverings per “Field Travel Guidance Appendix 1 USGS close quarters safety guidance” to reduce exposure to COVID-19.
 - Encourage crewmembers to practice frequent hand hygiene and avoid touching your mouth, nose or eyes with unwashed hands. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water is not available.
 - Emphasize respiratory etiquette and advise employees to cover their noses and mouth with tissue when coughing or sneezing or use the inside of your elbow and dispose of tissues immediately.
 - Encourage crewmembers to pack their own food and drinks if possible. Consider having non-

crewmembers do the shopping for provisions and other consumables just prior to the cruise to minimize risk of COVID-19 exposure.

- If possible, maintain a social distance of 6 feet from each other. If crewmembers must work together in close quarters as defined in “Appendix 1 Close Quarters Safety Guide” they should follow the personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements in the Appendix.
- Consider providing ditty bags with hand sanitizer, disposable wipes and other products useful when traveling.
- Strongly encourage crewmembers to use cloth face coverings when conducting all aspects of large vessel operations, vessel preparation, and travel to help supplement the overall strategy of controlling, reducing exposure, and to prevent community transmission of COVID-19.

Mitigation Strategies for Large Vessel Operations:

- **Mitigation strategies are very dependent on the ability to execute the Prevention planning above and implement the Mitigation planning below to minimize exposure to COVID-19 during large vessel cruises:**
 - The intent of this guidance is to recommend mitigation strategies for different aspects of large vessel operations. This guide gives strategies for pre-cruise planning, vessel enhancements, loadout procedures, and Underway Operations for both day trips and overnight cruises. Crewmembers should comply with the mitigation guidelines like all other safe operating procedures included in the Large Vessel Safety Program.
- **Mitigation strategies through enhancing the health safety of the large vessel:**
 - The most important aspects to mitigation are disinfection and social distancing. There needs to be an emphasis on “cleaning and disinfecting” the vessel before, during, and after each workday. Reference the “COVID-19 Cleaning and Disinfection Guidance” posted on the USGS COVID-19 portal site. Ensure ample supplies of cleaning and disinfecting equipment/supplies are on the vessel. Specifically locate antiseptic/cleansing wipes at locations where cross contamination can occur like galley microwave keypads, entry doors, etc. Install hand sanitizer stations in common spaces. Common spaces, railings, door latches, galley appliances, washer/dryers, etc., shall be disinfected after each use or at a minimum, twice a day.
 - Ensure there are adequate supplies of required PPE per “Field Travel Guidance” and other safety gear like gloves/eye protection/face shield/etc. that may be determined necessary on a case by case bases depending on the specific operations. If required PPE and cleaning/disinfecting supplies are not available, the Mission should be postponed or cancelled. Also, crewmembers are strongly encouraged to wear cloth face coverings per “Field Travel Guide” while working on the large vessel to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19.
 - The accommodation spaces are enclosed and if practicable the heating, ventilation, air handling systems should upgrade the air filtering system to HEPA type filters. This should help to improve the air quality of interior accommodation spaces. Depending on ventilation design crew should consider increasing fresh make-up air, reduce recirculation air as much as practicable, and keep exhaust fans on if possible, to improve air quality of interior spaces.
 - Improve the crewmember communication systems to accommodate social distancing by implementing wireless headsets, hands free radios, and other technologies to minimize face to face communications.
 - Provide signs and instructions throughout the vessel to inform crewmembers of the importance of safe practices to prevent spread of COVID-19 virus. (e.g., requiring frequent hand washing, don’t

touch mouth or eyes, strongly advise wearing a cloth face covering on vessel, sneeze and cough etiquette, cleaning commonly used surfaces, etc.).

- Minimize the use of shared objects like pens, pencils, keyboards, etc. to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Provide ample supplies of equipment to minimize the need for sharing to reduce risk of cross contamination.
- **Careful consideration should be given to mitigating exposure to COVID-19 when determining the large vessel crewmembers to be assigned on the cruise:**
 - The crewmembers should be experienced and able to work independently on the cruise to help meet the social distancing requirements. The minimum safe manning model should be used for all operations planned. No extra personnel or visitors should be allowed onboard for things like training, observation, or other non-essential missions.
 - Crewmembers should be notified well in advance (at least 14 days) to the planned cruise start date to properly follow the above noted prevention strategies. Supervisors should also plan for back up crewmembers to be prepared for a cruise in case there are unexpected cancelations. Back up crewmembers should stay separated from assigned crewmembers to better reduce the risk of exposure and spreading.
- **Procedures for loading, unloading, and conducting vessel preps prior to a cruise:**
 - Careful consideration should be given to the loading and handling of stores and equipment prior to cruise to reduce the risk of contamination. Transmission of COVID-19 occurs more commonly through respiratory droplets and the virus may remain viable for hours to days on different types of surfaces. Cleaning dirty surfaces and disinfection is a best practice to avoid exposure and, if practicable, load stores/equipment at least 72 hours in advance of cruise operations to provide time for passive decontamination. Limit the number and keep a record of the people handling the stores and equipment in case further decontamination is required due to a reported COVID-19 exposure.
 - Wear appropriate PPE per “Field Travel Guidance” as required and any other appropriate safety gear. Strongly encourage cloth face coverings per “Field Travel Guide” to help minimize contamination of stores and equipment with COVID-19 virus.
 - Ensure that adequate provision and equipment are loaded to last the duration of the cruise to minimize integration with public at other ports and reduce risk of COVID-19 exposure. Provisions should be wiped down prior to storage.
- **Mitigation strategies for COVID-19 while underway on large vessel:**
 - Wash hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer - often.
 - The mitigation strategy for social distancing should be adhered to while underway. Exterior spaces should have the maximum occupancy identified and posted to maintain the 6 ft distancing requirement. Designate the crewmember work areas for each mission requirement prior to the cruise to maintain proper separation distance apart.
 - Crewmembers are encouraged to wear cloth face covers and maintain 1 per every day of the work week). Crewmembers are responsible for packing and maintaining control of their assigned cloth face cover(s). At the end of each day crewmembers should stow their used cloth face cover in their own sealed plastic bag and are responsible for laundering their assigned cloth face covering. Hands shall be clean/sanitized prior to donning or doffing a cloth face covering.
 - Crewmembers should not share duties as much as possible to prevent cross contamination. Crewmembers should be designated to perform the specific parts of the operations for the

workday and avoid sharing equipment or controls if practicable and disinfect after use. If required to share equipment or controls, specifically if standing a watch rotation, then disinfect commonly touched surfaces (helm, throttles, chart-plotter, valve handles, etc...) at end of each watch. If required to work together in close quarters, follow the PPE guidance of “Field Travel Guidance Appendix 1 Close Quarters Safety Guidance”.

- o Crewmembers should bring their own provisions for day trips and overnight cruises if practicable, and not share coolers, frig, etc. and stagger eating times to maintain the social distancing requirement in galley and lounges.
 - o Crewmembers should remain onboard the vessel if a port call is made during a day trip or on extended overnight cruises to prevent COVID-19 exposure and contamination of the vessel.
 - o Each crewmember should only bring essential gear aboard the vessel to accomplish the mission. Designated lockers or bags should be provided to each crewmember for stowage of gear for duration of the cruise to help prevent cross contamination of COVID-19.
 - o Crewmembers should avoid sharing enclosed accommodation spaces if practicable and maintain social distancing requirements. Clean and disinfect surfaces that you touch or may have contaminated, specifically galley area and heads. Consider leaving exhaust fans on to improve air flow from space.
- **Mitigation strategies for COVID-19 while underway on extended overnight cruises:**
 - o The mitigation strategy for underway operations above should be followed as much as practicable. There are additional risks associated with extended overnight cruises with respect to onboard berthing arrangements and other shared vessel accommodations spaces like showers, lounges, pantry, etc. The mitigation strategies will vary on a case by case basis depending on the vessel design and mission of the large vessel and should be appropriately addressed by management/crew at the local level as necessary. Note: Planning for overnight cruises may reduce the maximum number of crewmembers allowed aboard compared to a day trip. A reduction of crewmembers for overnight cruises may restrict some operations due to the reduced manning requirement. Also, crewmember fatigue should be monitored and ensure there is compliance with current large vessel policy for work hour limits while underway.
 - o Extended overnight cruise planning for staggering crewmember use of the galley, lounge, pantry, and other common interior spaces can be difficult, especially on smaller vessels. Focus should be on social distancing and cleaning/disinfecting after use. Arrangements where separate food storage is not practicable consider mitigation strategies like package in sealed containers/bags, and food cooked or washed prior to consumption.
 - o Crewmembers should not share the same berthing quarters to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 through person to person spread or contact with contaminated surfaces. It is not practicable to expect social distancing in typical vessel shared berthing arrangements or sleep with a cloth face cover. Other enclosed accommodation spaces should not be shared as much as practicable. This and other underway mitigation strategies may change as reliable and available testing abilities for COVID-19 virus and antibodies are developed and approved for use by USGS.

Table 1. Change History Table

Version Number	Release Date	Filename	Changes Made
1.0	4/30/2020	COVID-19 Contingency Planning Guide for USGS Large Vessel Operations V.1 4/30/20	First issuance
2.0	5/15/2020	COVID-19 Contingency Planning Guide for USGS Large Vessel Operations V.2 5/15/2020	Updated cloth face covering guidance to be in line with DOI language “highly encouraged”. Formatted with consistent Times New Roman font