



Marine Safety Information Bulletin

Commandant
U.S. Coast Guard
Commercial Regulations & Standards Directorate
2703 Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE, STOP 7501
Washington, DC 20593-7501

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E-Mail: OutbreakQuestions@uscg.mil

COVID-19: Spotlight on the Mental Health of Mariners

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have significant impacts on the U.S. Marine Transportation System, the Global shipping industry and on mariners themselves. The risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19 infection and the prolonged nature of the pandemic have compounded existing stressors and created new stressors on maritime personnel, including feelings of isolation, and physical and mental fatigue caused by pandemic-related restrictions on crew changes, shore leave, and repatriation of seafarers. These issues have led to humanitarian concerns as well as concerns for the physical and mental health of mariners.

Mariner mental health concerns are of significant importance to the USCG as they may adversely affect vessel operations and life at sea. Mariner mental health concerns, including those stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, may include, but are not limited to, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicide. While some of these concerns arise in individuals with diagnosed mental illness, many occur in people who do not have a known mental health condition. The USCG is committed to working closely with industry partners and the National Merchant Mariner Medical Advisory Committee to identify successful strategies to promote mariner mental health. However, the USCG and its partners recognize that strategies will only be successful if mariners feel safe accessing and utilizing available mental health resources.

To that end, the USCG seeks to assure mariners that seeking mental health care will not jeopardize a mariner's medical certification. In fact, the National Maritime Center (NMC) routinely approves medical certification for individuals who have stable, well controlled mental health conditions. On the infrequent occasions that the NMC has denied medical certification to a mariner with mental health concerns, it was for mental health conditions that were not sufficiently controlled so as to pose a risk to public and maritime safety.

If you are a mariner who is in need of mental health care, please:

- 1) do so without fear of reprisal or punishment from the USCG; and
- 2) remember that it is generally better to seek help and treatment rather than putting yourself and fellow crew members at risk because of an untreated condition.

Information on the medical review process for mariners with diagnosed mental health conditions is available in the Merchant Mariner Medical Manual, COMDTINST M16721.48, which can be found here: [Merchant Mariner Medical Manual \(https://media.defense.gov/2019/Sep/11/2002181050/-1/-1/0/CIM_16721_48.PDF\)](https://media.defense.gov/2019/Sep/11/2002181050/-1/-1/0/CIM_16721_48.PDF).

Information on mariner health and wellness topics, including mental health, can be found in the Proceedings Magazine Fall 2020 Edition on Mariner Health & Wellness online at: [PROCEEDINGS MAGAZINE - Mariner Health & Wellness \(https://www.dco.uscg.mil/Portals/9/DCO Documents/Proceedings Magazine/Archive/2020/Vol77_No2_Fall20_Proceedings.pdf?ver=-Mytxq63r7KwEbZSlGxy8g%3d%3d\)](https://www.dco.uscg.mil/Portals/9/DCO Documents/Proceedings Magazine/Archive/2020/Vol77_No2_Fall20_Proceedings.pdf?ver=-Mytxq63r7KwEbZSlGxy8g%3d%3d).

Developing successful strategies to promote mariner mental health also require that the USCG and the maritime industry understand what mariners are experiencing. To reach this goal, researchers at the University of Washington School of Public Health are conducting a confidential survey of mariners to ask

how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their mental health. Mariners may complete the survey anonymously and study researchers will not share the personal information or individual responses of study participants with the USCG. The USCG wants to encourage all mariners to participate in this very important “Mariner Mental Health Needs during Covid-19” survey. Additional information on the survey can be found here: <https://mariners.coastguard.blog/2021/01/29/cmts-covid-19-working-group-survey-of-u-s-mariner-mental-health-needs-during-covid-19/>.

R. V. Timme, RDML, U.S. Coast Guard, Assistant Commandant for Prevention Policy sends.