



From the General Secretary

17 March 2020

Dear Area/Branch Welfare Officers and Shipmates

CORONAVIRUS (COVID 19) – ADVICE ON BEATING IT TOGETHER

Previously circulated Central Office advice still stands but, as self isolation and social distancing come closer, we need to take stock locally on how we can care for ourselves and each other as shipmates. Many shipmates are in the high-risk groups - particularly our senior members. There is a risk of information overload on Covid 19. This brief summary does not replace official advice but seeks to simplify it with an emphasis on senior shipmates. So, what's going on and what can you do?

Have I got it? The symptoms have been very well described but in summary key symptoms are fever with high temperature and hot to touch on chest and back with repeated dry cough. However sometimes shortness of breath, fatigue, aches and pains, sore throat, headaches are experienced. Many of the "sometimes" are what many seniors live with anyway.

How do I avoid it? The virus is taken into the body through the mucous membranes: eyes, nose and mouth and is most likely to be transferred by touching your face after you have picked it up on your hands from a surface. See below but reduce your risk of infection by washing hands in warm water with soap or gel for at least 20 seconds; catch sneezes in tissues and dispose of them then wash hands. No tissue to hand? Use your sleeve is the advice. Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth with dirty hands and finally do avoid contact with people who are unwell. Keep a distance of 2m from others where practicable

What should I do? Follow all the advice given and do not panic. Avoid crowds. List what you need to do to be able to stay at home eg. getting medicines and food shopping and see if others can do it for you. Also, if staying at home, remember to keep active and mobile; move every 15 minutes or so and exercise if you can. Keep your mind active with books, crosswords and some TV. Catch up with friends by phone for conversation. What about a de-clutter ready for the spring?

I'm over 70, should I self-isolate (stay indoors)? – The Government are now advising this will be recommended soon for all but essential needs. It is not legally enforceable (as yet) but is good advice so be prepared for your life to change. Ask yourself is it really essential for me to go out or travel? **Be particularly careful if you have underlying health conditions** such as diabetes, heart disease, COPD or cancer as this puts you at much increased risk. **We're all different but do ask family, friends and shipmates for help.**

What about seeing my family and friends? This is a matter for common sense and so long as you are careful you can have contact but avoid close contact, keep that 2m distance and wash those hands. Current advice is not to attend mass gatherings or pubs and clubs

What about food buying and my medicines? Panic buying of food is not the answer for any of us but do keep your stocks topped up. If you cannot get to the shops there will be others who can for you. Get your help in place. The same applies to your medicines.

How can I help my shipmates? Practically if you are at lower risk and stay healthy then offer to help as above. Contact your more senior shipmates (**but only if sure you are not infected**) and

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ask if you can help in their self-isolation. Keep a safe distance of 1-2 metres when door is answered and find out what is needed. Keep your hands clean on returning items. Be aware of what else will be offered by community groups locally and share to shipmates. Even a copy of the newspaper dropped off is keeping shipmates in touch with what's going on. For those more technically literate, setting up a Whats App group can keep everyone socialised or alternatively a Friends Group on Facebook as virtual Shipmates and Oppos. You can make it happen to everyone's benefit.

If in the high-risk group and at home **don't be alone**. Why not become a **“Virtual Shipmate and Oppo”** and keep in touch by phone, text or email or letter with each other. A chance to make new friends and contacts! Self isolation will mean social isolation for many seniors. Branch Secretaries should have contact details for all their shipmates that they can share to help make this happen but all shipmates in Branch can help. The Secretary and Welfare Advisor cannot reach everyone. Even if only have a group of three or four that will help.

What about NHS care? The NHS is there for essential use only as capacity will be really stretched in the coming months. Advice is not to go to your GP, Pharmacy or Hospital if you have symptoms but self isolate.

Where can I find out more or get help? There are many sources but key ones are the NHS (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>) and Government (<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>) sites for current advice. Alternatively look at NHS 111 online (<https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19/>) for advice and assessment if feeling unwell but only call if you feel you cannot cope with your symptoms at home or your condition gets worse or your symptoms do not get better after 7 days.

Please distribute widely, keep following government public health guidelines and look after your oppos by phone. text or email.

Best wishes,

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