KOREA: Update from correspondents Mutual Service Korea

**DATE 7 May 2021**

The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) still requires that seafarers who have embarked vessels in high risk countries must be able to produce a negative COVID-19 PCR test result (obtained within 72 hours prior to the vessel’s departure from that high risk country) when serving on board vessels arriving at Korean ports. Countries considered high risk at the present are Russia, Philippine, United Kingdom, Republic of South Africa, France, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. A vessel will be exempt from providing the aforementioned PCR test result in inevitable/reasonable reason to be proved/accepted by the Authority prior to vessel’s calling.

There is amendment of the Korean Quarantine Act with effective as of 7 April 2021 that

1. if the vessel fails to provide a negative COVID-19 PCR test result for seafarers who embarked in high risk countries, it would be imposed a penalty not exceeding KRW 10Million or imprisonment less than 1 year.
2. If a vessel fails to fulfil the requirements (for example, the test result is neither issued by a designated institution nor within 72 hours before departure), (1) the seafarers on board will be required to undergo a COVID-19 test upon arrival at a Korean port, (2) all seafarers onboard would not allow to be shore, (3) cargo operation can be conducted after obtaining a negative result of PCR test, (4) the seafarer(or master) would be imposed a penalty of KRW 1,000,000 in the breach of this Act.

Notwithstanding the above, the guidelines may change at any time and Members should check with their local agent before calling at a port in Korea.

**UPDATE 28 October 2020**

(Ministry of Foreign Affairs) When a crewmember embarks in Russia, they should first submit a negative Covid-19 PCR test result to the Korean Embassy in Russia, and then submit same to the Quarantine office upon arrival in Korean port. This is effective with PCR test results issued from 23 October 2020.

(Ministry of Justice / Oceans and Fisheries) When a vessel either called in Russia or The Philippines or had a crew change within 14 days, a crew change in Korean ports is not allowed. This is effective when a vessel has a crew change in Russia and Philippines from 31 October 2020.

The authority intends to minimize foreign crewmember’s disembarkation/shore pass except in an emergency situation such as crew injury. If the vessel fails to submit a proper negative COVID-19 PCR test result, this is a violation of Ship’s Arrival and Departure Act which provides a restriction to vessel’s calling in Korean ports, as well as a violation of Quarantine Act. The relevant guidance published by the Korean Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries is available as a pdf in the Korea section of the Steamship Covid webpage

Notwithstanding the above, the guidelines may change at any time and Members should check with their local agent before calling at a port in Korea.

**UPDATE 21 October 2020**

The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) has announced a modification to its requirement that seafarers who have embarked vessels in high risk countries must able to produce a negative COVID-19 PCR test result (obtained within 48 hours prior to the vessel’s departure from that high risk country) when on serving board a vessels arriving at Korean ports. Countries considered high risk are Pakistan, Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, Philippine, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan & Russia. The modified regulation provides that, effective from 19 October 2020, a vessel will be exempt from providing the aforementioned PCR test result in the following cases:

1. It exceeds 28 days since the vessel left the port in the high risk country and the vessel has called at the ports in two or more countries before calling in Korean port.
2. The vessel makes an unscheduled call at a Korean port for the purpose of sheltering due to heavy weather
3. It is considered, at the discretion of the head of the quarantine office, that the vessel’s call at a Korean port is unexpected and inevitable.

In the event the seafarer received the negative result from a COVID-19 PCR test prior to 48 hours before the actual departure from a high risk country because the vessel’s departure was delayed for the following reasons, such PCR test result will be accepted:

1. the departure is delayed due to Acts of God and/or heavy weather
2. the departure is delayed due to breakdown of the vessel
3. It is considered, at the discretion of the head of the quarantine office, that the vessel’s departure was delayed inevitably. [We understand this broadly means due a cause beyond the control of the vessel]

If the vessel fails to provide a negative COVID-19 PCR test result for seafarers who embarked in high risk countries, or otherwise fails to fulfil the requirements (for example, the test result is neither issued by a designated institution nor within 48 hours before departure), all seafarers on board will be required to undergo a COVID-19 test upon arrival at a Korean port. However, the seafarers’ disembarkation and shore pass still is not allowed.

The regulations provide for a penalty not exceeding KRW 10Million or imprisonment less than 1 year for violation of the Korean Quarantine Act.

Cruise vessels are not allowed to call at any port in Korea.

Notwithstanding the above update, the authority’s guidelines may change at any time and we suggest the Members to check with their local agent before calling at a port in Korea.