



P.O. Box 8277  
368 Hamilton Avenue  
St. John's, NL A1B 3N4  
tel. 709-722-8177  
fax. 709-722-8201  
[www.nlfhsa.com](http://www.nlfhsa.com)

## Communicable Disease Briefing **COVID-19 Safe Work Practices**

April 19, 2020

Fish harvesting is one of the most dangerous occupations in Newfoundland and Labrador. Fish harvesters address new challenges everyday as they prepare for the 2020 fish harvesting season. How to operate a safe, commercial fishery in the midst of a COVID-19 global pandemic is their latest and most complex challenge.

At this time, there are no specific vaccines or treatments for COVID-19. Consequently, the best way to prevent and slow down the transmission of the COVID-19 virus is to be fully informed about the disease, how it spreads, and possible control measures that will help to contain and prevent the spread.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Fish Harvesting Safety Association (NL-FHSA) has been working to gain an understanding of COVID-19 and its potential impact on the fish harvesting industry in this province. The work has been carried out in partnership with the FFAW-Unifor and the Professional Fish Harvester Certification Board (PFHCB), and in collaboration with other representatives of the NL-FHSA Board of Directors and Advisory Committee. The NL-FHSA also reached out to fish harvesting safety associations across the country as well as the Provincial Chief Medical Officer of Health for input.

This is an unprecedented time for everyone in the fishing industry and it is challenging to develop safe work practices that can be applied to all fishing vessels given the type of vessel, vessel size and crew size. The Communicable Disease Briefing COVID-19 Safe Work Practice has been developed using the most-up-to-date public health information available on COVID-19 and is subject to change as new information on COVID-19 becomes available. It is presented as a guideline for fish harvesters to use to prevent the spread of COVID-19 on their vessel and amongst their crew. It is important to note however that, given the limited space on board most small fish vessels, if any person on board the vessel has COVID-19, it will be difficult to contain transmission of the virus to the rest of the crew.

We know that not all vessels will feel it feasible to implement every best practice within this document. It is the intention that harvesters will apply what they can from this document to ensure the safest work environment possible for themselves and their fellow crew members.

*Brenda Greenslade*  
Executive Director, NL-FHSA

*David Decker*  
Board Chair, NL-FHSA

## **Background Information NL-FHSA**

The Newfoundland and Labrador Fish Harvesting Safety Association (NL-FHSA) is a not-for-profit industry-led organization representing a co-operative, inclusive model of the fish harvesting sector helping reduce injuries and save lives at sea. The Association's Board of Directors and Advisory Committee are made up of industry experts in all aspects of the fish harvesting industry who have the knowledge and experience required to improve safety and save lives at sea.

In addition to fish harvesters from the three fleet sectors, representation from the Aboriginal/First Nations/Metis fish harvesters and the processing sector, stakeholders are represented by the following organizations:

- Professional Fish Harvester Certification Board
- Fish, Food and Allied Workers/Unifor
- WorkplaceNL
- Department Fisheries and Land Resources
- Occupational Health and Safety Branch Service NL
- Department Fisheries and Oceans
- Transport Canada
- Canadian Coast Guard
- Marine Institute
- SafetyNet
- Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour
- Newfoundland and Labrador Employer's Council

# **COVID-19 Safe Work Practices**

## **Overview**

COVID-19 is a global pandemic which means it is an illness that has spread worldwide. Consequently, COVID-19 is affecting all of us. Everyone must do their part to protect each other from becoming infected. Every person doing their part can have a powerful effect!

This is an unprecedented time and the COVID-19 pandemic is presenting unique challenges to the fishing industry. This industry is an important part of the food supply chain in Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as worldwide. Every link in the chain is vital to ensure the fish harvesting industry operates smoothly during this crisis. It's up to us, as individuals and together as an industry, to keep each link in the chain strong!

The fishing industry operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week and employs thousands of workers all over Newfoundland and Labrador. One person infected with COVID-19 has the potential to spread the infection to others they come into contact with, whether it be family, friends, co-workers, suppliers or strangers on the street. In order to stop the spread of COVID-19, all attempts to limit the spread of the virus must be taken.

It has never been more important than now to explore safe work practices to help contain and prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the fish harvesting industry. This is challenging given the nature of the work and the number of individuals and service providers involved in the supply chain. Fish harvesters need to be especially attentive in preventing the spread of COVID-19 and keeping themselves and each other, their families and the general population safe in the face of this COVID-19 outbreak. All individuals including employers, contractors, service providers and workers who are engaged in work in or around the fish harvesting industry in any capacity also need to be especially mindful of their responsibilities to work safely according to the specific occupational health and safety requirements for their work activities. One recommended best practice that we must follow, regardless of where we live and work, is to behave as though everyone around us, ourselves included, is a carrier of COVID-19 and has the potential to infect others.

## **Purpose of COVID-19 Safe Work Practices**

Every fish harvester doing their part can have a powerful effect in stopping the spread of COVID-19 in the fish harvesting industry. Safe work practices for the fishing industry that reduces fish harvester's risk of exposure to COVID-19 must be practical, reasonable and achievable. These safe work practices which incorporate public health guidelines have been developed to educate fish harvesters about the activities that increase their risk of exposure

to the COVID-19 illness and provide suggestions in draft for control measures that help to prevent transmission of the disease.

## **Responsibilities**

Commercial fishing is often described as the most dangerous occupation in the world. Fishing safety is diverse because it is difficult to address all of the complexities that arise in the commercial fishing industry. Fishing vessels are workplaces where safety is a shared responsibility between the Owner/Operator/Skipper and the crew of the vessel. While there are no easy or obvious solutions, the risks are reduced when a well-trained crew operates a vessel that is designed, equipped and maintained according to established rules and procedures.

## **Health and Community Services Requirements**

Effective March 18, 2020, the Minister of Health and Community Services declared COVID-19 a public health emergency under the Public Health Protection and Promotion Act. While a public health emergency is in effect, the Chief Medical Officer of Health can introduce special measures necessary to protect the health of the population. A person in breach of these orders could face a fine or jail time. A corporation found in breach of these orders could face a fine of \$5,000 to \$50,000.

Orders issued to date under Public Health Emergency can be found at [www.gov.nl.ca/COVID-19](http://www.gov.nl.ca/COVID-19)

## **Occupational Health and Safety Requirements of Owners, Operators and Crew Members**

Numerous federal and provincial regulations, government departments and agencies have responsibility for enforcement of regulatory requirements that provide the minimum level of safety for a vessel, its crew and operations. These requirements outline the general occupational health and safety responsibilities for employers and workers.

### *Owners and Operators*

The Owners/Operators of fishing vessels as employers have responsibility to exercise every reasonable precaution to provide healthy and safe work environments and ensure the health and safety of every person they employ is protected while they are working. The Owners/Operators/Skippers are responsible to ensure that crew members are provided with adequate information, instruction, and facilities to safeguard against workplace hazards.

The Owners/Operators/Skippers of fishing vessels also have responsibility to exercise every reasonable precaution to maintain the work premises in a way that ensures the health and safety of others (service providers, contractors, visitors) not in their employ. Access to the

work premises may also be restricted to unauthorized personal and visitors with exceptions made on a case-by-case basis.

### *Crew Members*

Crew members as workers have a responsibility to take reasonable care to protect their own health and safety and that of other workers and people at or near the workplace, and to ensure workplace procedures are carried out as written and communicated.

## **Assessing the Risks**

### **COVID-19 - *Why is it hazardous?***

COVID-19 is a new respiratory illness that transmits readily by respiratory droplets and can affect the lungs and airways. COVID-19 is extremely contagious. Consequently, anyone who comes into contact with the virus is at high risk of becoming infected.

### **COVID-19 – *How is it spread?***

COVID-19 spreads easily, mostly through direct person-to-person contact but also indirectly by touching surfaces contaminated with the virus.

Most commonly, the virus spreads between people who are in close contact (within 6 feet) of each other. The virus is contained in respiratory droplets and aerosols produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, breathes or talks. The droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or inhaled directly into the lungs.

The virus can also spread through indirect contact when the respiratory droplets from an infected person lands on surfaces. It can be transmitted when individuals touch those surfaces with their hands and then touch their mouth, nose or possibly their eyes. It is not certain how long the coronavirus can live on surfaces however; scientists estimate it can survive between a few hours and several days.

### **COVID-19 – *Who is at Risk?***

Everyone is at risk of contracting COVID-19 as it is highly contagious and spreads easily. COVID-19 is a serious health threat and the risk is increased for people who live and work in close proximity to others who may be carriers of the virus. It is impossible to know who may be infected with the virus without adequate testing.

People who are infected with COVID-19 may have little or no symptoms as it may take up to 14 days for symptoms to appear after exposure to COVID-19. This means that while the infection is brewing in people, it may go unnoticed; however, it can still be transmitted through close person-to-person contact. Common symptoms of COVID-19 include two or more of the following (new or worsening): fever (or signs of fever such as chills, sweats, muscle aches and light-headedness), cough, headache, sore throat, and runny nose. Everyone is susceptible to infection, but older adults and persons with heart and lung disease and diabetes may experience more severe effects due to their underlying health conditions.

Anyone who has concerns about their symptoms, should self-monitor and seek advice by calling 811, the Newfoundland and Labrador Health Line. **811** is a confidential and free telephone line available to all residents of the province, regardless of age. It provides access to a Registered Nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Currently, there is no vaccine for COVID-19.

## **COVID-19 – *The Risk for Fish Harvesters?***

The Newfoundland and Labrador fishery is an essential food source with markets worldwide and fish harvesters are a vital link in this food supply chain. In 2020, fish harvesters (owners/operators/crew members) are facing a new challenge in operating a safe, commercial fishery in the face of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Fish harvesters, given the nature of their industry, work in close proximity with each other whether they are preparing their fishing gear, readying the vessel for fishing, conducting the business of fishing or offloading fish for market. The work regularly involves interaction with countless other individuals such as off-loaders and provisioning crews, monitors, graders and observers, fuel and food suppliers, repair service personnel, truckers, forklift operators, buyers, transport workers, plant workers, harbour authority personnel, federal and provincial government officials, other fishing vessel crews, public on-lookers, etc.

Regardless of the vessel size, fish harvesting crews work in close contact with each other. Fish harvesters who work on larger vessels may spend extended periods at sea where they are confined in close quarters for long periods of time; working together and sharing food, sleeping accommodations and washrooms.

Many fish harvesters fall into the category of older workers given their ages and this is an additional factor that puts them at risk if they become infected with COVID-19.

## **COVID-19 – *Minimizing risk***

Recommendations for the prevention of COVID-19 are evolving as more becomes known about this illness. What is known at this time is that there are no anti-viral medications or vaccines that can prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The source of COVID-19 virus is a human host who sheds the virus through respiratory droplets and aerosols to other individuals when coughing, sneezing, breathing or talking; or to surfaces where it can survive outside the body of a host for a period of hours to days. People can be carriers of COVID-19 and shed it in their environments although they may or may not show any symptoms of the illness. The only way to know if someone is infected with COVID-19 is to have a positive COVID-19 test. Testing is only performed on a case-by-case upon the recommendation of a health care practitioner.

COVID-19 is highly contagious and everyone is at risk. The elderly and those with underlying medical conditions are particularly susceptible. Currently, the most effective means of minimizing the risk of COVID-19 is to implement multiple strategies using engineering and administrative control measures as well as personal protective equipment.

## **COVID 19 – *Best Practices for Fish Harvesters to Control the spread***

This Safe Work Practice is presented as a guide for fish harvesters to use in their attempts to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the fish harvesting industry. It has been developed utilizing the most up-to-date information on COVID-19 available at the time the Safe Work Practice was released. Given the limited space on board small fishing vessels, it will be important for owners/operators/skippers to have a plan for handling crew members should they develop two or more of the symptoms of COVID-19 at sea as it will be difficult to contain transmission of the virus to the rest of the crew.

<b>STEP</b>	<b>CONTROL MEASURES</b>
1.	<p>Two weeks in advance of departure preparations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Owner/Operator/Skipper conducts a safety briefing to all crew members on COVID-19 risk assessment and safe work practices. Each crew member confirms receipt of the briefing and review of safe work practices relevant to them.</li> <li>• The Owner/Operator/Skipper and crew members take individual measures to reduce the risk of contracting COVID-19 when not engage in fishing. These measures are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Stay at home unless it is otherwise necessary.</li> <li>○ Avoid having visitors in your home.</li> <li>○ Avoid group gatherings and public spaces with crowds</li> <li>○ Maintain distance from other people of at least 2 meters which lessens the chances of catching COVID-19.</li> <li>○ Use good hand hygiene practices often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use a 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer if the hands are not visibly dirty and soap and water are not available.</li> <li>○ Use respiratory etiquette, cough or sneeze into a tissue or the bend of the arm.</li> <li>○ Clean and disinfect surfaces regularly.</li> <li>○ Self-monitor temperature to ensure it stays below 38° C.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
2.	<p><b>BOARDING RESTRICTIONS</b></p> <p>The Owner/Operator/Skipper limits entry onto the vessel to crew members and service personnel to include fuel suppliers, repair mechanics and technicians. Service personnel are to be escorted at all times by a crew member designated by the Owner/Operator/Skipper. Access to all other persons including Observers, Buyer, Monitors, family members, etc. is denied.</p> <p>The Owner/Operator/Skipper implements pre-boarding screening of all individuals (in one-on-one sessions) prior to their boarding of the vessel.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-boarding screening consists of asking crew members and service personnel the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Do you have two or more of the following symptoms (new or worsening): fever (or signs of fever such as chills, sweats, muscle aches and light-headedness), cough, headache, sore throat, and runny nose. The severity of symptoms can range from mild to severe.</li> <li>○ Have you been in contact with anyone over the past 14 days who exhibited symptoms of COVID-19?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Have you been in close personal contact with anyone who has entered the province within the past 14 days?</li> </ul> <p>Individuals who answer yes to any of the questions will not be permitted entry on the vessel and will be advised to go home and self-monitor and self-isolate as per public health recommendations outlined at <a href="http://www.gov.nl.ca/COVID-19">www.gov.nl.ca/COVID-19</a>. Individuals with symptoms should complete the COVID-19 Self-Assessment also available on the NL government website at <a href="http://www.gov.nl.ca/COVID-19">www.gov.nl.ca/COVID-19</a>. Persons with questions or concerns about self-isolation should call the Canadian Red Cross COVID-19 Help Line at 1 800 863-6582.</p> <p>Crew members complete a pre-boarding self-declaration form as part of the screening process.</p>
<p><b>3.</b></p>	<p><b>LOADING PREPARATION</b></p> <p>The Owner/Operator/Skipper coordinates with the berth provider (processing plant, small craft harbour, harbour authority, etc.) to ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A restricted area having a safe means of access to the vessel is provided for use only by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ His/her crew members for loading of fishing gear, food and supplies.</li> <li>○ His/her fuel suppliers, repair mechanics and technicians; and</li> <li>○ Shore workers from the processing plant and/or truckers to load bait and ice supplies.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>The Owner/Operator/Skipper coordinates with other Owners/Operators/Skippers to ensure that restricted areas around each vessel are maintained and enforced and there is limited interaction between crew members. Where interaction cannot be avoided, physical distancing requirements must be maintained.</p>
<p><b>4.</b></p>	<p><b>PHYSICAL DISTANCING</b></p> <p>Crew members are required to make conscious effort to minimize close contact with others. To do this, crew members should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Maintain a distance of 2 meters where possible.</li> <li>● Avoid common greetings such as handshakes.</li> <li>● Avoid handling each other's personal effects (hats, gloves, clothing, kit bags, etc.)</li> <li>● Stow personal effects.</li> </ul>

## 5. MASKS

Wearing a non-medical mask or facial covering (e.g., homemade cloth mask) in public spaces can be an additional measure crew member can take to protect others around them. It is another way of covering the mouth and nose to reduce the chance of respiratory droplets from contaminating others or preventing respiratory droplets from landing on surfaces. Wearing a non-medical mask is not a replacement for following proven measures such as handwashing and physical distancing.



## 6. PERSONAL HYGIENE

Crew members are encouraged to practice personal hygiene to avoid contracting the virus by:

- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom, touching dirty surfaces such as taps and doorknobs, when preparing food, before and after eating, after coughing and sneezing, handling contaminated waste, laundry, or whenever hands look dirty.
- Use 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer if hands are not visibly dirty. Visible, dirty surfaces will need to be cleaned before disinfecting.
- Use disposal towels to dry hands.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue or the bend of the arm, not the hand.
- Dispose of any tissues immediately in a lined waste basket and washing the hands afterwards.
- Avoid touching the eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- No sharing personal items, toothbrushes, washcloths, cigarettes.
- No sharing phones, computers, and electronics unless they have been thoroughly cleaned. Refer to manufacturer recommendations before cleaning these items.

## 7. ENVIRONMENTAL CLEANING PRACTICES

Increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting of high touch surfaces.

	<p>Clean commonly touched surfaces frequently with regular household cleaning products or a diluted bleach solution (0.5%hypochlorite).</p> <p>Some commonly touched surfaces include door handles and railings, cupboard doors, tables, appliances, electronics, steering systems, engine and hydraulic systems controls, washrooms, light switches, phones, gangways, bunks, washrooms, etc.</p> <p>Thoroughly clean the vessel between fishing trips.</p>
<p><b>8.</b></p>	<p><b>FOOD HANDLING</b></p> <p>In order to minimize handling of shared food, dishes and cutlery by crew members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remove shared food containers such as shared coffee cream dispensers, salt &amp; pepper shakers, etc.)</li> <li>• Do not share food, unwashed eating utensils and beverage containers.</li> <li>• Have one designated person involved in food preparation and dispensing food onto plates.</li> <li>• Minimize handling of multiple sets of cutleries.</li> <li>• Use pre-packaged snacks.</li> <li>• Practice good hand hygiene.</li> <li>• Ensure that all food preparation, table and counter surfaces are cleaned frequently.</li> </ul>
<p><b>9.</b></p>	<p><b>SLEEPING ACCOMMODATIONS</b></p> <p>Physical distancing of 2 meters between bunks on some vessels may be challenging given the layout and size of the vessel. Where possible:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assign crew their own bunk accommodation and</li> <li>• Do not share linens, pillows and blankets unless they have been previously laundered.</li> <li>• Use curtains to provide a barrier between sleeping areas.</li> </ul>
<p><b>10.</b></p>	<p><b>UNLOADING PREPARATIONS</b></p> <p>The Owner/Operator/Skipper coordinates with the berth provider (processing plant, small craft harbour, harbour authority, etc.) to ensure a restricted area having a safe means of access to the vessel is provided for use only by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• His/her crew members for unloading of fishing gear, food, and supplies.</li> <li>• Shore workers from the processing plant to deposit the landed catch respecting the distance of 2 meters between individuals.</li> </ul>

The Owner/Operator/Skipper coordinates with the berth provider (processing plant, small craft harbour, harbour authority, etc.) to ensure adequate space for physical distancing alongside the vessel is provided for use by:

- Dockside monitors.
- Buyers.
- Graders; and
- Shore workers.

The Owner/Operator/Skipper coordinates with other Owners/Operators/Skippers to ensure that restricted areas around each vessel are maintained and enforced and there is limited interaction between crew members. Where interaction cannot be avoided, physical distancing requirements must be maintained.

#### **11. CREW MEMBERS WHO BECOME ILL AT SEA**

Prior to sailing, crew members are prepared for emergencies and complete emergency drills. Crew members should notify the Owner/Operator/Skipper immediately if they start to feel ill with symptoms of COVID-19. Contact the 811 Health Line for guidance. Based on the condition of the crew member and the presenting signs and symptoms, the Owner/Operator/Skipper will follow their emergency response plan and implement the necessary plan of action to return the crew member to shore.

Whenever possible, measures should be taken to isolate the ill crew member from the rest of the crew to decrease the person-to-person transmission of the virus. When doing this,

- Isolate the ill crew member where possible to their sleeping quarters, monitor and provide food, water, tissues and other necessary supplies.
- Clean and disinfect shared accommodations and bathrooms frequently,
- place laundry, bedding and towels used by the ill crew member in a waste bag and stored securely away from other people.
- Take measures when it is not possible to isolate ill crew members who have COVID-19 symptoms. Arrange sleeping quarters as needed so that the distance is at least 2 metres between the ill individual and those that are well.
- Use of a mask by ill individuals, may act as a barrier and helps stop the tiny droplets from spreading during coughing or sneezing:
  - Masks should not be touched or handled during use.
  - If the mask gets wet or dirty with secretions, it must be changed immediately.
  - Discard the mask in a household waste bag after use.
  - Wash and dry the hands after removal of the mask.

## **12. REACHING SHORE WHEN A CREW MEMBER HAS COVID-19 SYMPTOMS**

Upon reaching shore, ill crew members who are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 should do the following:

- Go immediately home, monitor symptoms and self-isolate.
- Complete the COVID-19 Self-Assessment available on the NL government website at [www.gov.nl.ca/COVID-19](http://www.gov.nl.ca/COVID-19) to help determine if testing for COVID-19 may be necessary.

Crew members who were in close person-to-person contact with the ill crew member and are experiencing COVID-19 like symptoms may have been potentially exposed to the virus. Crew members in this situation should follow the same practices as outlined above.

Fish harvesters who contract COVID-19 arising out of and in the course of their employment, have an obligation to report under workers' compensation legislation.

## COVID-19 SAFE WORK Self-Declaration Form

<b>NAME:</b>	<b>CFV #</b> <b>VESSEL NAME (if applicable)</b>
<b>ADDRESS</b>	<b>LOCATION:</b>
<b>DATE</b>	<b>Skipper/Owner/Operator</b>

<b>Please answer the following questions below YES or NO</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
1. Have you received a briefing on COVID-19 Risk Assessment and Safe Work Practices?		
2. Over the past two weeks have you done the following:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Stayed at home unless it was otherwise necessary.</li> <li>○ Avoided having visitors in your home</li> <li>○ Avoided group gatherings and public spaces with crowds</li> <li>○ Maintained distance from other people of at least 2 meters.</li> <li>○ Used good hand hygiene practices washing your hands often and well with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or used a 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer if your hands were not visibly dirty and soap and water were not available.</li> <li>○ Used respiratory etiquette, by coughing or sneezing into a tissue or the bend of the arm.</li> <li>○ Cleaned and disinfected surfaces regularly.</li> <li>○ Self-monitored your temperature to ensure it stayed below 38°C.</li> </ul>		
3. Do you have two or more of the following symptoms (new or worsening): fever (or signs of fever such as chills, sweats, muscle aches and light-headedness), cough, sore throat, and runny nose?		
4. Have you been in contact with anyone over the past 14 days who exhibited symptoms of COVID-19?		
5. Have you been in close personal contact with anyone who has entered the province within the past 14 days?		
If you answered yes to questions 3, 4, or 5, please provide more details here.		

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_