

# The best defence is a good offence – Why vaccinations matter

A regular Crew Health team review of seafarer medical statistics found the main cause of crew failing the medical was active Hepatitis B – an immunisable and preventable illness.

1012 cases of Hepatitis B, representing 8.7% of total unfitness cases, were discovered over the 20 years of the Programme history. Somewhat surprising perhaps when we consider a vaccine for Hepatitis B is readily available and can be administered at any stage either prior or during crew training, or even at the pre-employment examination. (For more information on Hepatitis B, please see our PEME advice: Hepatitis B – The silent epidemic.)

In addition to Hepatitis, the Club has seen an increase in the notification of Chickenpox cases onboard. Chickenpox, often dismissed as a ‘childhood’ illness, can be severely debilitating if contracted in later life, and can have serious implications for people with low immune systems.

An effective way to prevent infections onboard ship is good personal hygiene; regular washing of hands, taking a shower regularly, brushing your teeth, and also regular washing of personal clothes and bedding.

However, for seafarers who travel around the globe, often these simple precautions are not enough. Vaccination is the most effective method to prevent the spread of common, preventable, illnesses onboard.

The Club’s Crew Health programme investigated the cost of immunisations in numerous locations within their approved clinic network. Whilst costs do vary depending on the location,

many are very reasonably priced, and in some countries, certain vaccines are even offered free.

Seafarers often travel to many destinations around the globe, and each port may bring its own disease or illness. Also, because of their often long periods of time without receiving any medical care, it is recommended that crew obtain early vaccination. Certain specific infections such as: Yellow Fever, Hepatitis A and B, and Typhoid Fever are all readily preventable but cannot be treated on a ship, and can have serious consequences if contracted.

Just because crew members may be regular travellers to the same part of the globe, doesn’t mean vaccinations should be skipped. Seafarers are not alone on the ship, and it is impossible to know if all members of the crew have received

vaccinations or if they have an active infection, sometimes without symptoms or even knowing it. Cross infection in confined spaces is a very real possibility.

The UK P&I Club encourages shipowners to consider early intervention through the introduction of a vaccination programme at crew entry level. Immunisation is advised for all crew to ensure maximum prevention of disease. Additionally, if required at a later stage, crew could also be vaccinated as part of their pre-employment medical examination.

Seafarers are encouraged to keep their vaccinations up-to-date. A seafarer who can fight the infection will be able to continue in his job and be efficient on board. In a worst case scenario, a sick seafarer may need to be repatriated, putting more pressure on his fellow crew members, and risking the spread of the infection to the rest of the crew.

The UK P&I Club Crew Health team are available for further queries on vaccinations, please contact the team at: [peme.ukclub@thomasmiller.com](mailto:peme.ukclub@thomasmiller.com)



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## CREW HEALTH PROGRAMME

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The Club was the first to launch a crew health scheme in 1996 due to increasing crew illness claims and a lack of accountability of clinics. Since 1996, the Crew Health programme has become one of the Club's leading loss prevention initiatives. The aim of the programme is to reduce the volume and value of crew illness claims which are caused by a pre-existing illnesses or disease. These underlying conditions often impact on the crew member's fitness for service and can endanger not only the health of the seafarer but also the onboard safety of other crew.

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Sophia joined Thomas Miller in 1992 and from 1994 worked as a claims handler dealing mainly with French and Spanish Members. In 2004, Sophia became the Crew Health Programme Director. Sophia has undertaken a large number of clinic audits, implemented the standard medical form and clinic guidelines. She has also lead the scheme through the largest period of growth and development with a doubling of approved clinic facilities and a four fold member increase. Sophia is a Director of Thomas Miller & Co. Ltd.

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Saidul Alom joined Crew Health from the European Region Service Team in 2004. Saidul provides administrative support to the Crew Health programme and is responsible for liaison with the approved clinics on financial billing matters and ensuring prompt payment of all clinic fees

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Stuart joined Thomas Miller in 1998 as a claims trainee for UK P&I Club's Greek Members. In April 2005 Stuart joined Crew Health as the Team Administrator. Stuart is responsible for co-ordination of Member entries and administration for the clinic approval process.