

Revised medical certification policy during COVID-19 pandemic information for Merchant Seafarers and Fishermen

The MCA has put in place contingency plans to mitigate disruption to essential delivered services as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak. This policy has been revised to include reference to acceptable equivalent medical certificates (MSN 1815).

As more MCA Approved Doctors return to performing face to face ENG 1 examinations, it is expected that this policy will be used less frequently. It is the seafarer's responsibility to ensure they have made every effort to attend an ENG 1 examination.

We are updating the Approved Doctors lists as often as possible to reflect doctor's availability, please refer to the links below when looking for available doctors.

UK based Approved Doctors: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mca-approved-doctors-uk-based>

Overseas Approved Doctors: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mca-approved-doctors-overseas>

Exceptions for medical fitness certificates on UK Flagged vessels which have expired or are due to expire imminently

Where there are continuing difficulties in obtaining medical fitness certificates during the COVID-19 pandemic, the three-month period as currently stated in MSN 1887 section 3.4 and MSN 1883 section 3.8 is extended to 6 months. This should not be considered as a blanket extension and there will be no further extension beyond 6 months.

Prior to COVID-19 Pandemic

Scenario 1 (On board) A person whose medical fitness certificate has expired during the course of a voyage may continue to work until the next port of call at which a replacement certificate can be obtained, or for up to three months from the date of expiry of the certificate – whichever is the sooner. The validity of the certificate itself cannot be extended. A replacement medical fitness certificate must be obtained at the next port at which it is possible to do so.

Scenario 2 (Joining a ship) In urgent cases, with MCA's approval, a person who has no valid medical fitness certificate because their medical certificate has expired within the last month, may exceptionally be employed for a period not exceeding three months without a valid medical certificate, provided that their last medical fitness certificate was valid for a full 24 months (or 12 months if the seafarer is under 18 years of age). A replacement medical fitness certificate must be obtained at the next port at which it is possible to do so. Any case requiring approval should be referred to MCA's Medical Administration Team.

NEW Revised Exceptions for ENG 1 holders on UK Flagged Vessels during the pandemic period

Scenario 1 (On board)

There is no need to involve an Approved Doctor (AD) or MCA in the exception process. You or the Master should print a copy of this guidance to present with your (expired) certificate which is then acceptable for the stipulated period.

- **If your ENG 1 certificate is valid for the full 2-year period (or 1-year for under 18s):** The above exception will be extended to **6 months** for those whose certificate expires during a voyage.
- **If your ENG 1 certificate is time limited (valid for less than 2 years due to medical reasons):** The exception for current voyage (for 3 months after a time limited certificate expires as above) is retained. If you are still on board at the end of that three-month exception you will require a [Telephone Review](#) to assess whether a further exception of 3 months can be approved or not.

Scenario 2: If you need to join a ship with an expired ENG 1 certificate

- **If your ENG 1 certificate is valid for the full 2-year period (or 1-year for under 18s):** The above exception will be extended to **6 months** for those whose certificate has expired within the **last three months**. You or the Master should print a copy of this guidance to present with your (expired) certificate which is then acceptable for the stipulated period.
- **If your ENG 1 certificate is time limited (valid for less than 2 years due to medical reasons) and has expired within the last month:** you will require a [Telephone Review](#) to assess whether an exception for a maximum of 6 months can be approved or not.

NEW Revised Exceptions for holders of an acceptable equivalent medical certificate (MSN 1815) on UK Flagged Vessels during the Pandemic period

Scenario 1 (On board)

You or the Master should print a copy of this guidance to present with your (expired) certificate which is then acceptable for the stipulated period.

- **If your acceptable equivalent medical fitness certificate is valid for the full 2-year period (or 1-year for under 18s):** The above exception will be extended to **6 months** for those whose certificate expires during a voyage.
- **If your acceptable equivalent medical fitness certificate is time limited (valid for less than 2 years due to medical reasons):** The original exception still stands, and the certificate exception is only valid for up to three months from the date of expiry of the certificate.

Scenario 2: If you need to join a ship with an expired acceptable equivalent medical certificate

- **If your acceptable equivalent medical fitness certificate is valid for the full 2-year period (or 1-year for under 18s):** The above exception will be extended to **6 months** for those whose certificate has expired within the **last three months**. You or the Master should print a copy of this guidance to present with your (expired) certificate which is then acceptable for the stipulated period.
- **If your acceptable equivalent medical fitness certificate is time limited (valid for less than 2 years due to medical reasons):** You do not meet the requirements for the exception and your certificate cannot be used to join a vessel. You should obtain a new medical fitness certificate when possible to do so.

Reporting of Medical Conditions

In both of the above scenarios you must still adhere to section 9 of MSN 1887 if you are a merchant seafarer, and section 8 MSN 1883 if you are a fisherman, as follows.

If you are absent from work for 30 days or more for a medical reason (illness or injury), you must report the reason as soon as possible to an Approved Doctor (if practicable the one who issued your certificate) who will advise whether a further medical examination is required before the you can return to work.

Similarly, if a you develop a medical condition which may affect your fitness to work at sea, you must report this to an Approved Doctor and if advised to do so, attend for a medical examination for re-issue of your medical certificate.

In either case, once the absence or condition is identified, your medical fitness certificate is suspended until it has been assessed by a medical practitioner. This may not require examination, but as a minimum, advice should be sought from the Approved Doctor. Failure to seek re-assessment in the light of a newly identified medical condition may put at risk both you and those you work with.

Telephone review with an Approved Doctor (only necessary for time limited ENG 1 certificates)

- You should contact the MCA Approved Doctor who issued your expired ENG 1 certificate, as they will have the access to your previous records.
- Only if this is not possible, then contact another MCA Approved Doctor who will need further information from your GP or specialist as relevant.
- The Approved Doctor is entitled to charge you a proportionate fee for this service.
- If the Approved Doctor can grant an exception, then they will email an MCA exception letter to you or the Master. This will carry full details of the Approved Doctor with their stamp and signature.
- It may not be possible for the Approved Doctor to make a decision on your fitness over the telephone without a full face to face medical examination. It has to be accepted that this may not be possible as guidance changes.

General

MCA have advised Approved Doctors that they may need to prioritise, by focussing on those who are providing essential services such as those working on life-line ferries, cargo ships, containers, Oil tankers, fishing vessels etc. This can be confirmed by a letter from your company confirming that you are a key worker or are providing a key service.

MCA Medical Reviews

If the referee is able to review your specific case on paper, backed up by telephone or Skype discussion with you the review may continue. However if the medical condition being reviewed requires a face to face examination, this may not always be possible, in which case it will be deferred until such a time when face to face examination is possible.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sally Bell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'S'.

Dr Sally Bell
MCA Chief Medical Advisor