

Merchant Marine Circular

Panama Maritime Authority
General Directorate of Merchant Marine
Control and Compliance Department

MERCHANT MARINE CIRCULAR MMC- 339

To: Shipowners/Operators, Company Security Officers, Legal Representatives of Panamanian Flagged Vessels, Panamanian Merchant Marine Consulates and Recognized Organizations (ROs).

Subject: Medicine Chest and Medical Equipment

Reference: Law N° 2 of January 6, 2009 - Maritime Labour Convention (MLC, 2006)
WHO 'International Medical Guide for Ships' **(Only as Recommendation)**

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1. All Panamanian Flag ships shall carry a medicine chest and medical equipment that complies with the requirements in the current edition of the WHO 'International Medical Guide for Ships', and bearing in mind the number of persons on board and the nature and duration of the voyage.
 2. In the Panamanian Flag Ships, the shipowners shall ensure that seafarers working on board their ships have prompt access to the necessary medicine, medical equipment and facilities for diagnosis and treatment, and to medical and occupational health protection information and expertise, which is generally comparable to that provided to workers ashore.
 3. The list assumes that on-board medical treatment is dispensed by an officer working under the responsibility of the master. Ships with a doctor on board may carry an expanded range of medicines and other medical equipment and supplies.
 4. The list should include, for each item, such details as expiry date, storage conditions, and quantities remaining after purchase or use. A record of treatment given to any person on board, including the type and quantity of any medicines administered must be entered in the ship's log.
 5. The ship's master is responsible for managing medical supplies kept on board, although he may delegate responsibility for their use and maintenance to a properly trained crew member. Nevertheless, however well-trained, crew members are not medically qualified.

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A doctor should always be consulted about serious illness or injury or when any doubt exists about the proper action to take in treating a patient. All Panamanian Flag ships carrying 100 or more persons and ordinarily engaged on international voyages of more than 3 days duration shall carry a qualified medical doctor.

6. The medicines and medical equipment shall be inspected in a period, not exceeding 12 months, by the designated medical officer on board, who shall ensure that the labeling, expiry dates and conditions of storage of all medicines and directions for their use are checked and all equipment functioning as required. Panamanian Flag State annual safety inspections shall also be used to verify that medicine chests.
7. Drawers or medicine cabinets should be large enough to store medicines and equipment in an orderly manner so that they are easily identified and available for immediate use. This is particularly important for medicines and equipment used in emergencies: these should be kept separately in the most accessible place. Generally, items of the same type or category should be stored in a box, shelf or drawer, properly labelling. Controlled medicines must be kept apart in a locked compartment, preferably the master's safe, in a room that is locked when unoccupied (see below, under Controlled drugs).
All medicines must be kept in good condition and protected against humidity and temperature extremes. When not otherwise specified, they should be stored at room temperature (15–25 °C). A refrigerator should be available nearby for storage of items that must be kept at 2–8 °C. This refrigerator should not be used for any other purpose and should be equipped with a lock.
8. An expiry date for a medicine corresponds to the average maximum shelf life for that medicine, given appropriate storage conditions. Medicines must be inspected regularly to make sure they have not reached or exceeded their expiry dates: those that have should be replaced and then discharged properly. Advice should be provided to the port of the type of garbage (e.g expired medicines) to be discharged and its separation and the estimated amounts. The port may have special discharge requirements related garbage which may carry certain disease (i.e taken to a pharmacy to be destroyed) therefore Panama flag ships are encouraged to observe ports special requirements of discharge of expired medicines as garbage. Certain types of medical equipment also have expiry dates. Moreover, some countries impose fines on ships entering their territory with expired medicinal items on board.
9. All Panamanian Flag ships shall carry on board the current edition of the WHO publication 'International Medical Guide for Ships' and for those ships carrying dangerous cargoes, in addition shall carry the 'Medical First Aid Guide' and special

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equipment on board according to the International Maritime Dangerous Goods (IMDG) Code for use in accidents involving dangerous cargoes.

10. In addition, the master of the vessel is required to maintain a register of controlled drugs and this register must not be discarded before two years have elapsed after the date of the last entry.

11. Following the International Medical Guide for Ships, for the administration of oxygen the recommended appliance should be as follows:

Recommended Item	Quantity per 10 crew
• Portable oxygen set, complete, containing	1
• 1 oxygen cylinder, 2 1/200 bar	1
• 1 spare oxygen cylinder, 2 1/200 bar	1
• Pressure regulating unit and flow meter with tubes such that ship's industrial oxygen can also be used	1
• 3 disposable face masks of choice including simple face mask and non-rebreathing mask	3

12. Regarding the inspection of the oxygen cylinder, take note of the following:

- The bottles shall be annually inspected.
- The contents of the cylinders are to be checked and changed as required by manufacturers.
- The cylinders shall be hydrostatically tested every five years.
- The hydrostatic testing must be carried out by an accredited services agent or test facility.
- Following the hydrostatic test a thorough inspection and internal examination must be carried out prior to recharging.
- The test certificates must be provided and retained on board for the inspection.

13. International medical guide for ships: including the ship's medicine chest, 3rd Ed. World Health Organization. <http://www.who.int/iris/handle/10665/43814>



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August, 2025 – *The last provision of Paragraph 12 was deleted. Some minor changes were made in Paragraph 12.*

March, 2021 - *Inclusion of new Paragraph 11.*

October, 2019 - *Inclusion of new paragraph 11.*

July, 2019 - *Modification of paragraph 8.*

September, 2018 - *Inclusion of new paragraphs 7, 8 and 11.*

October, 2016.

Inquiries concerning the subject of this Merchant Marine Circular or any other request should be forward to:

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