

Medical fitness and assessment of commercial divers during the COVID-19 outbreak

Guidance for divers

In the light of advice from Public Health England on COVID-19, HSE issued guidance on 24 March 2020, setting out a proportionate and flexible approach to enable medical assessment of commercial divers to continue. The advice set out below, updates that guidance. It continues to balance the need to protect the health, safety and welfare of divers and the current constraints presented by the COVID-19 outbreak. It also takes account of emerging evidence of lung and cardiac changes arising in individuals with COVID-19.

The guidance takes effect from 27th May 2020. HSE will continue to review it as appropriate.

Preliminary considerations

Divers must understand:

- their legal duty under regulation 13(1) of the Diving at Work Regulations 1997, which requires that they must not dive in a diving project if they know of anything, including any illness or medical condition, which makes them unfit to dive.
- any condition or injury occurring during a diver's career may influence their fitness for diving work. Under certain circumstances, following illness or injury, a diver must undergo re-examination by an Approved Medical Examiner of Divers (AMED) to assess their fitness to return to work.

Return to diving post COVID-19 infection

COVID-19 status	Minimum recovery time from symptoms resolving before diving can resume	Return to work assessment by an AMED required
Previously asymptomatic and tested positive for coronavirus	1 month	No
Previously had mild symptoms that improved within a week with complete resolution and back to their baseline level of exercise tolerance.	1 month	No
Previously had moderate symptoms and back to their baseline level of exercise tolerance	2 months	Yes
Previously had severe symptoms requiring hospitalisation and back to their baseline level of exercise tolerance	3 months	Yes

Medical assessments

Those divers who have had no symptoms, not needed to self-isolate, or who have had similar symptoms to COVID-19 but tested negative may be able to undergo an interim assessment by an AMED.

Divers meeting the criteria above (highlighted in bold) who, as a result of the restrictions due to COVID-19, are unable to find an AMED available to provide a face to face medical examination, may be able to obtain a medical certificate of shorter validity by means of a telephone interim assessment with an AMED.

The AMED should obtain a completed medical questionnaire from the diver as a self-declaration plus their last MA2 form and undertake a telephone consultation. Providing there are no problems and the diver's last medical certificate was for 12 months, they can issue a medical certificate for 3 months.

At the end of the 3-month extension period, an AMED should perform a face to face medical examination to renew the diver's certificate.

A medical certificate of longer duration than the 3-month extension period (as above), can only be issued by AMEDs who conduct a face to face medical examination in accordance with MA1.

Note: In accordance with previous HSE guidance issued on 24 March 2020, some divers had an automatic extension of their medical certificate to 1 June 2020. For such divers the AMED can follow the interim assessment procedure above. If there are no problems, they can issue a new medical certificate which extends the diver's 12-month certificate up to a maximum of 3 months from its expiry date (eg if the diver's certificate expired on 10 April and was automatically extended to 1 June, the AMED can issue a certificate with an expiry date of 10 July). At the end of the 3-month extension period, an AMED should perform a face to face medical examination to renew the diver's certificate.

All other divers:

All other divers will need to undergo a full medical in accordance with the requirements of MA1. In some circumstances, a medical without the breathing (spirometry) test can be performed. If this is the case, and the medical assessment is satisfactory, a 6-month medical certificate may be issued.

Where a diver requires an initial medical, the AMED should obtain a completed medical questionnaire from the individual, countersigned by their GP, and conduct a full medical examination in accordance with MA1.

In all cases, the divers should discuss options and availability with their AMED.

Specific guidance is being provided to the AMEDs by HSE, and this will be regularly reviewed to ensure it reflects the most up to date position.

Questions

Divers should contact: diving@hse.gov.uk