



Medisea Newsletter

Enhancing Health Awareness for Seafarers

At the Club, we recognise the impact that health and wellbeing have on our Members' operations, which is why we look for ways to empower Members and seafarers with essential health knowledge delivered by our accredited doctors.

These initiatives form part of our Medisea scheme, which aims to promote better health outcomes, reduce medical claims, and enhance overall wellbeing for seafarers worldwide.

This edition focuses on

Tuberculosis and the QuantiFERON Test

What seafarers need to know

What is Tuberculosis (TB)?

TB is a disease caused by bacteria that mainly affects the lungs. It spreads through the air - when someone with active TB coughs, sneezes, or speaks, people nearby can breathe in the bacteria. TB remains a serious health problem in many countries, particularly in South East Asia.

TB in the Philippines

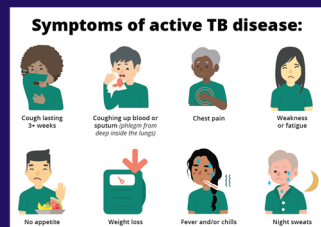
The Philippines is a high TB-burden country. For every 100,000 people, there are an estimated 500 to 643 new TB cases each year, one of the highest rates in the world. Beyond those who are actively ill, many Filipinos carry TB bacteria without any symptoms at all. This is called Latent TB Infection (LTBI).



This edition was written by

Nigel Griffiths

Marine Advisory Medical &
Repatriation Service



Find out more information
on how to stop TB from
the infographic above

Active TB vs. Latent TB

Active TB: You are sick. Symptoms include:

- Cough lasting more than 2 - 3 weeks
- Coughing up blood or phlegm
- Fever, night sweats, unexplained weight loss
- Chest pain, extreme tiredness

Active TB is **contagious**. In the confined spaces of a vessel, it can spread quickly among crew.

Latent TB: No symptoms

The bacteria is in your body but controlled by your immune system. You feel well, you are **not contagious**, and you cannot spread TB to others. However, under stress, poor nutrition, or illness, latent TB can become active.

Think of latent TB like a smouldering ember - not a fire yet, but it can become one.

How is TB diagnosed?

For Active TB

Doctors examine sputum (phlegm) under a microscope or use a molecular test called Xpert MTB/RIF. A chest X-ray is also standard.

For Latent TB: The QuantiFERON Test

The QuantiFERON-TB Gold test is a blood test. It checks whether your immune system has ever been exposed to TB bacteria, even if you were never sick. In plain terms, it tells doctors whether TB bacteria has been in your body before. It is commonly used alongside a chest X-ray during your PEME.

What a positive result means

It DOES mean:

- Your immune system has been exposed to TB in the past
- You may have latent TB

It does NOT mean:

- You are sick right now
- You are contagious
- You cannot work as a seafarer
- You will definitely develop active TB

Doctors review your QuantiFERON result alongside your chest X-ray and medical history before deciding on any next steps.

A positive result with a normal X-ray and no symptoms may simply lead to a short course of preventive medicine - not disqualification from sea service.

Why this matters at sea

Life on board creates unique TB risks:

- Confined spaces make it easier for TB to spread between crew.
- Medical care at sea is limited, illness mid-voyage is difficult and costly to manage.
- A seriously ill seafarer may need medical evacuation, disrupting the vessel and crew.
- Long voyages, fatigue, and poor sleep can weaken immunity, allowing latent TB to activate.

The PEME process, including the QuantiFERON test, helps catch these risks early; protecting you, your crewmates, and the vessel.

What happens if a concern is found?

Your examining doctor will discuss any findings with you. A positive QuantiFERON result alone, with no abnormal X-ray or symptoms, usually leads to monitoring or preventive treatment, not an automatic bar from sea service.

The Medisea scheme exists to keep seafarers healthy at sea, not to exclude them unfairly.

Your health is your most important asset. Early detection is always better than dealing with serious illness far from home.

Port entry and repatriation risk

One often overlooked aspect of TB is how port state authorities respond to it. Even latent TB, where you are not ill and pose no risk to others, can trigger a serious response from immigration or port health officers in certain countries.

Some port states take a strict approach. A TB-related finding on your medical record or chest X-ray may be enough to result in:

- Denial of shore entry or port clearance.
- A requirement to be sent home immediately, regardless of your fitness to work.
- The vessel facing delays while a replacement crew member is arranged.
- The ship owner bearing the cost of a medical escort flight home - which can be significant.

This is why early detection and proper documentation matter. A seafarer who knows their TB status - and has received appropriate preventive treatment - is in a far stronger position than one who is flagged unexpectedly at the port gate.

The goal of the Medisea PEME scheme is to stay ahead of this, identifying and managing TB risks before a seafarer joins a vessel, we reduce the chance of a disruptive and costly situation arising mid-voyage or at port.

Meet the Medisea team



Hemant Phul
Head of Medisea and Industry Relations



Esther Chong
Medisea Liaison Executive

Contact us:

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to the Medisea team. You can find their details on our Medisea webpage.

Our accredited clinic network

97

Accredited clinics across Asia

Spanning 8 countries

India

Indonesia

Malaysia

Myanmar

Phillippines

Singapore

Sri Lanka (new)

Thailand (new)

Protecting seafarer health through quality pre-employment screening