

# Advisory Circular

ISSUE NO. 34-4, 25 FEBRUARY 2014

## Maritime Rules – Part 34: Medical Standards

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## 1. General

### 1.1 Purpose of advisory circulars

Maritime New Zealand (MNZ) advisory circulars are designed to give assistance with and explanations about the standards and requirements set out in the maritime rules. However, the notes in advisory circulars should not be treated as a substitute for the rules themselves, which are the law.

If an advisory circular sets out how a rule can be satisfied, then compliance with that advice ensures compliance with the rule. While other methods of complying with the rule may be possible, MNZ would first need to be satisfied that those alternative methods are of an equivalent standard to what is advised in the advisory circular. The advisory circular would then be amended to include those equivalents.

This advisory circular supports the new Part 34: Medical Standards, which comes into effect on 1 April 2014. (A number such as 34.10 refers to a specific rule within Part 34.)

## 1.2 Application of Part 34

Part 34 sets out the medical requirements and standards for New Zealand seafarers. Seafarers need to have a certificate of medical fitness if they:

- are under 18 and the ship operates outside restricted limits
- have an MNZ certificate of proficiency or certificate of competency
- work on foreign-going passenger ships or foreign-going non-passenger ships of 500 gross tonnes (GT) or more
- work on New Zealand passenger and non-passenger ships of 45 metres (m) or more that proceed outside restricted limits.

## 1.3 Summary of the rule

Part 34 implements the STCW (Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers) medical requirements for STCW certificates. The medical standards are taken from the recommended International Labour Office/International Maritime Organization *Guidelines on the Medical Examinations of Seafarers (ILO/IMO Medical Guidelines)*. These are flexible guidelines, which must also be applied (with any necessary modifications) for certificates of medical fitness issued for national certificates.

Certificates of medical fitness are valid for a period of two years, after which they must be renewed. There is also an obligation for the certificate to be 'current'. This means that a seafarer who suffers a serious illness or injury, or develops a new medical condition, must obtain a new certificate before returning to work.

## 2. Supportive guidance to the Part

### 2.1 General advice to seafarers

A career at sea requires that individuals be medically fit. It is strongly recommended that someone contemplating a career at sea obtains a certificate of medical fitness before beginning their seafarer training. If there are problems with medical fitness, it is better to identify these early on to avoid investing time and money unnecessarily.

Colour vision is an important aspect of medical fitness for seafarers. Ships' navigation lights and aids to navigation (beacons and buoys) are coloured, as are warning lights on control panels and electrical wiring. It is possible to have problems with colour vision without being aware of them. Having colour vision tested early is a wise precaution before starting seafarer training.

### 2.2 Approval of medical practitioners

Medical examinations for certificates aligned with STCW and STCW-F (Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Fishing Ship Personnel, 1995) need to be carried out by an approved medical practitioner. Those interested in becoming an approved medical practitioner should, in the first instance, contact Certification and Ship Registration at MNZ (phone 0508 22 55 22 or 04 473 0111).

An approved medical practitioner must be registered and have experience relevant to assessing that seafarers are fit for the types of duties they are likely to encounter at sea. The medical practitioner must be professionally independent from employers, seafarers, and employer and seafarer representatives.

Approvals are valid for five years before they must be renewed.

The Director of MNZ may approve a medical practitioner if the applicant meets the requirements of section 41 of the Maritime Transport Act, 1994 (MTA). The applicant must make an application on the form provided, pay the required fee and include any additional information or material that is requested.

A list of approved medical practitioners will be available from 1 April 2014 on MNZ's website: [maritimenz.govt.nz](http://maritimenz.govt.nz).

## **2.3 Subpart A – Medical examination of young persons**

No operator or master can employ a seafarer under the age of 18 years unless they have a valid (less than 12 months old) certificate of medical fitness that has been issued by a medical practitioner approved by the Director of MNZ.

This applies to all seafarers employed on New Zealand ships, other than those operating only in restricted limits, and to seafarers engaged on a foreign ship in New Zealand.

## **2.4 Subpart B – Medical standards for seafarers**

Subpart B applies to seafarers applying for, or who hold, certificates of proficiency or competency issued under Part 32. It also applies to other seafarers (such as catering staff) on New Zealand SOLAS (International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, 1974) ships (foreign-going passenger ships and foreign-going non-passenger ships of 500GT or more), and other New Zealand ships of 45m or more that go beyond restricted limits.

To receive a certificate of medical fitness, holders of certificates aligned with STCW and STCW-F and other seafarers on SOLAS ships are required to pass a medical examination by a medical practitioner approved by the Director of MNZ.

Certificates of medical fitness for national certificates can be issued by a registered medical practitioner (that is, they do not need to be by a medical practitioner approved by the Director).

A seafarer working on a ship operating in the unlimited area must also carry a certificate that shows the type, place and date given of all vaccinations the person has received.

A seafarer must produce his or her current certificate of medical fitness when requested to do so by the Director or the master of the ship on which they are employed.

### **2.4.1 Assessment process**

#### **Seafarer responsibilities**

The seafarer must provide some form of official photographic identity, such as a passport, maritime qualification or driver's licence. The document type and number should be recorded on the certificate of medical fitness or eyesight test report. If a passport is used, please record the country of issue.

He/she must complete the applicable sections of the MNZ medical examination form. Although the seafarer is required to make a self-declaration of medical history, MNZ recommends that it be completed with the assistance of medical staff, and preferably of the medical practitioner. This allows for any issues raised by questions to be explored in the examination.

The seafarer should surrender to the medical practitioner any previous certificate of medical fitness they have that is related to their maritime certificate.

### **Medical standards**

Part 3 of the ILO/IMO *Medical Guidelines* sets out guidance for medical practitioners about the conduct of medical examinations for seafarer certificates.

When conducting the assessment, the medical practitioner needs to consider a range of matters before issuing a certificate of medical fitness. These include the requirements and standards specified in Appendices B to E of the ILO/IMO *Medical Guidelines*, vaccination requirements for seafarers operating in unlimited areas (see Appendix 1 of that document), and the nature of the duties the seafarer performs.

Further details about what needs to be taken into account can be found in MR 34.8(3) and the more detailed guidance prepared by MNZ (Guidance for Medical Practitioners). These will be available from 1 April 2014 on MNZ's website: [maritimenz.govt.nz](http://maritimenz.govt.nz).

### **Eyesight and colour vision standards**

The medical practitioner must ensure that the seafarer's eyesight and colour vision meet the eyesight and colour vision standards set out in STCW A-I/9 (see Appendix). These standards apply for all New Zealand certificates of proficiency and competency.

The seafarer must also be examined for any evidence of serious or progressive eye disease. More detailed guidance on the application of the eyesight and colour vision standards will be available from 1 April 2014 in the Guidance for Optometrists on MNZ's website: [maritimenz.govt.nz](http://maritimenz.govt.nz).

The medical practitioner must record the results of eye and vision tests on the Certificate of Medical Fitness for Seafarers. The application of the standards varies according to the nature of the seafarer's duties and functions (for example, deck, engineering) and, in the case of national certificates, their area of operation. The options are outlined in the table below.

In some instances, where a seafarer fails to meet the colour vision standards the Director may issue a certificate that includes limitations (as set out in the table). The Director will only issue a certificate in this situation where they are satisfied that the limitation addresses the failure and allow the seafarer to fully perform routine and emergency duties (such as daylight hours only for domestic deck certificates for deck certificate holders who are working in restricted limits).

Certificate type	General eyesight standards	Colour vision standards
STCW and STCW-F deck	As prescribed in A-I/9 of STCW code Must pass general eyesight test in accordance with this standard	As prescribed in A-I/9 of STCW code Must pass colour vision test in accordance with this standard
STCW and STCW-F radio, engineering, and electro-technical	As prescribed in A-I/9 of STCW code Must pass a general eyesight test subject to allowance in standard for combined vision	As prescribed in A-I/9 of STCW code Restricted certificate permitted if failed, as considered appropriate by the Director
National deck	As for STCW and STCW-F deck	As for STCW and STCW-F deck Restricted certificate limiting to daylight hours only to be issued if failed
National engineering	As for STCW and STCW-F engineering	No standard to meet
Others	Sufficient for duties	Sufficient for duties

**Table 1 Eyesight and colour vision standards**

Where a seafarer requires a certificate of medical fitness to apply for a new deck certificate, they must have their eyes and colour vision tested by a registered optometrist. It is recommended that the seafarer has the eyesight tests before the medical examination.

The medical practitioner can conduct the eyesight and colour vision tests for seafarers whose certificate of medical fitness has expired, or who require the tests to renew their certificate. They can also conduct the eyesight and colour vision tests for engineers applying for a new certificate. The medical practitioner can also require the seafarer to have their eyesight and colour vision tested by a registered optometrist if they have any concerns that require more specialist attention.

Failing eyesight and colour vision tests does not prevent a medical practitioner from issuing a medical certificate of fitness. However, the medical practitioner must indicate on the certificate any restrictions or limitations that apply. The Director of MNZ can also require that a seafarer undergoes eyesight and vision tests conducted by a registered optometrist for the issue of a certificate of medical fitness.

### Specialist assessment

The medical practitioner can obtain specialist testing or advice to supplement the examination, if there are doubts about some aspect of a seafarer's medical fitness. The seafarer is responsible for any charges associated with additional testing or assessment. Areas where it may be appropriate to seek additional testing or assessment include chest X-rays, hearing, vision, sleep problems, diabetes, epilepsy, and alcohol and drug issues.

The seafarer should give permission to seek additional information from other health professionals.

### Categories of medical certificate

On completion of a medical examination, the medical practitioner must issue a certificate of medical fitness in the form specified by the Director, indicating the medical category applying to the seafarer, and forward a copy of the certificate to the Director. The categories are described in the table below.

Category number	Category name	Conditions	Implication
A	Unrestricted sea service	None	The seafarer is fully fit for unrestricted sea service and the expiry date should therefore be the maximum allowed
A(T)	Unrestricted sea service	Medical surveillance required at intervals  Certificate is valid until the time such surveillance is required	The seafarer needs medical supervision, which should be specified. The period of validity of the certificate is up to the practitioner's discretion and may range from the maximum downwards. There may also be restrictions on the nature or area of allowable sea service
B	Restricted sea service only	Restrictions endorsed on the medical certificate	These may be restrictions such as 'restricted to NZ coastal waters only'. The period of validity is up to the practitioner's discretion and will range from two years downwards
C	Temporarily unfit for sea service	Endorsed with number of weeks before the seafarer is re-examined	The seafarer is considered temporarily unfit for sea service. The length of time (weeks) before or the date after which the seafarer may be re-examined must be stated on the certificate
D	Indefinitely unfit for sea service	Endorsed with number of months before the seafarer is re-examined	The seafarer is considered indefinitely unfit for sea service. The length of time (months) or the conditions to be met before the seafarer can be re-examined must be stated on the certificate
E	Permanently unfit for sea service	Cannot work at sea	The seafarer is considered permanently unfit for sea service

**Table 2 Categories of medical certificate**

In the case of category A(T), the expected duration of the seafarer's tour of duty should be taken into account when considering surveillance intervals.

For category B, the medical practitioner may stipulate that the seafarer's employment is restricted by certain conditions. These conditions could include shipping trades, geographical areas, types of ship or types of job, with time restrictions applied as appropriate.

No operator or master can employ a seafarer, or seafarer join a ship, unless they have a valid category A, A(T) or B certificate of medical fitness, as appropriate to the position.

### **Criteria for national certificates**

While Appendices B to E of the ILO/IMO *Medical Guidelines* still apply for national certificates, the medical practitioner has a greater degree of discretion in applying the medical categories, to take account of:

- the proximity to shore and shore-based medical facilities of the ships on which the seafarer will be able to work
- how the proximity to shore may lower any risk of adverse effects to the health and safety of the seafarer, or to other seafarers and passengers, or to the safety of the ship. For example, the availability of shore-based medical care and the time within which the seafarer can receive it (such as Skipper Restricted Limits holders working in enclosed limits), how easily a condition can be effectively monitored by a health professional, and/or limiting duties to those where the medical condition is not relevant.

Further guidance about how to apply these criteria will be available from 1 April 2014 on MNZ's website: [maritimenz.govt.nz](http://maritimenz.govt.nz).

### **2.4.2 Entitlement to re-examination**

If a seafarer is issued a certificate of medical fitness with a medical category of B, C, D or E, the medical practitioner should tell the seafarer that he/she is entitled to apply to the Director for a further examination. The seafarer should also be informed of any conditions that should be fulfilled before he/she reapplies for examination. This examination must be by an approved medical practitioner nominated by the Director.

If a medical practitioner issues a certificate of medical fitness indicating a medical category of C or D, the seafarer must not, unless the Director approves otherwise, apply for a certificate from another medical practitioner until the expiry of the period endorsed on the certificate.

### **2.4.3 Validity of certificates of medical fitness**

Certificates of medical fitness are valid for two years, unless a shorter time is specified on the certificate. For people aged under 18, a medical certificate is valid for one year.

You need to be re-examined by an approved medical practitioner before you start work if:

- you have been unable to work for 30 days or more due to illness or injury
- you have been discharged or evacuated from a ship for health reasons.

The Director can ask for a re-examination if they have doubts about a seafarer's medical fitness.

The seafarer's general eyesight standards must have been tested by a registered optometrist in the 12 months preceding their application for a new certificate, and the preceding 24 months when renewing an existing certificate.

The colour vision standards must have been tested in the preceding six years.

### **2.4.4 Corrective lenses**

The medical practitioner must endorse the certificate of medical fitness if the seafarer needs to wear corrective lenses. Where these are required for performing watchkeeping duties, a spare pair must be conveniently located on board the ship.

Tinted glasses should not be used for lookout duties at night. This includes photochromic lenses whose level of tinting changes as light levels change. During the time that the tinting changes, vision is obscured.

#### **2.4.5 Eye surgery**

Following refractive or cataract corrective eye surgery, a seafarer must wait for three months before having his or her visual acuity tested by an approved optometrist. Only when the visual acuity standards are met can the seafarer return to seagoing employment.

#### **2.4.6 Monocular vision**

The Director may accept monocular vision in the case of a currently qualified seafarer if the Director is satisfied that, after consulting with a registered optometrist, the seafarer can cope with the range of tasks likely to be encountered at sea. However, it is unlikely that a person with monocular vision will be approved to work in a deck capacity.

The seafarer must not show any evidence of serious or progressive disease in his or her good eye.

For both deck and engine duties, if a seafarer loses sight in one eye an application for medical examination cannot be made until at least six months have passed since the loss of sight.

#### **2.4.7 Expiry of certificates of medical fitness of STCW certificate holders during a voyage**

If the certificate of medical fitness of a STCW certificate holder expires in the course of a voyage, the medical certificate will remain valid for up to three months until the next port of call where a medical practitioner recognised by the New Zealand under STCW is available.

#### **2.4.8 Equivalent certificates**

The Director may accept a certificate of medical fitness issued to a seafarer by a medical practitioner from another country, provided it is less than two years old and meets the standards required by Part 34.

The Director cannot accept a certificate of medical fitness for the purposes of recognition of an STCW certificate unless it has been issued by a medical practitioner approved by the administration of a country that is party to STCW. The Director must also be satisfied that the other country has implemented satisfactory standards and measures for the issue of medical certificates. These medical certificates must contain the information required by STCW, in the appropriate format.

### **2.5 Subpart C – Seafarers on foreign ships**

A seafarer on a foreign ship that is in a New Zealand port must hold a current certificate of medical fitness issued by or on behalf of a state that is a party to STCW. He or she must produce the certificate of medical fitness upon request.

### **2.6 Subpart D – Transitional and revocation provisions**

Medical practitioners who were approved under the previous Part 34 can continue to examine seafarers until the approval expires on their maritime document, at which time they must renew their approval. The medical practitioner will be able to examine seafarers seeking national seafarer certificates as a registered medical practitioner, whether or not the practitioner is approved under Part 34.

### 3. STCW Table A-I/9

STCW regulation	Category of seafarer	Distance vision aided <sup>1</sup>		Near/intermediate vision	Colour vision <sup>3</sup>	Visual fields <sup>4</sup>	Night blindness <sup>4</sup>	Diplopia (double vision) <sup>4</sup>
		One eye	Other eye	Both eyes together, aided or unaided				
I/11 II/1 II/2 II/3 II/4 II/5 VII/2	Masters, deck officers and ratings required to undertake lookout duties	0.5 <sup>2</sup>	0.5	Vision required for ship's navigation (such as chart and nautical publication reference, using bridge equipment and instrumentation, and identification of aids to navigation)	See Note 6	Normal visual fields	Vision required to perform all necessary functions in darkness without compromise	No significant condition evident
I/11 III/1 III/2 III/3 III/4 III/5 III/6 III/7 VII/2	All engineer officers, electro-technical officers, electro-technical ratings, and ratings or others forming part of an engine room watch	0.4 <sup>5</sup>	0.4 <sup>5</sup>	Vision required to read instruments in close proximity, operate equipment, and identify systems/components as necessary	See Note 7	Sufficient visual fields	Vision required to perform all necessary functions in darkness without compromise	No significant condition evident
I/11 IV/2	GMDSS radio operators	0.4	0.4	Vision required to read instruments in close proximity, operate equipment, and identify systems/components as necessary	See Note 7	Sufficient visual fields	Vision required to perform all necessary functions in darkness without compromise	No significant condition evident

1. Values given in Snellen decimal notation.
2. A value of at least 0.7 in one eye is recommended to reduce the risk of undetected underlying eye disease.
3. As defined in the *International Recommendations for Colour Vision Requirements for Transport* by the Commission Internationale de l'Eclairage (CIE-143-2001, including any subsequent versions).
4. Subject to assessment by a clinical vision specialist, where indicated by initial examination findings.
5. Engine department personnel shall have a combined eyesight vision of at least 0.4.
6. CIE colour vision standard 1 or 2.

### 4. Guidance on vaccination requirements for seafarers

Seafarers should be vaccinated according to the requirements indicated:

- in the World Health Organisation publication *International Travel and Health: Vaccination Requirements and Advice*, which is updated periodically
- or by the International Association of Medical Assistance to Travellers
- or by a recognised source similar to those listed in Appendix 3(a) and (b) that is acceptable to the Director.

## 5. General enquiries

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All current rules and advisory circulars can be found on our website: [maritimenz.govt.nz](http://maritimenz.govt.nz).

Printable versions can be downloaded from the landing page for each rule. If you are creating a full set of rules, printable versions of the cover pages and side insert tabs can be downloaded.

ISBN 978-0-478-39024-7

Published by Maritime New Zealand

PO Box 25620, Wellington 6146, New Zealand

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