



Questions about the coronavirus

How is Mercy Ships dealing with the coronavirus?

The evolving situation of COVID-19, highlighted by the WHO as a pandemic and the increasing travel restrictions applied by several countries, have made it impossible for Mercy Ships to continue to carry out its programs to the required standards, while protecting against the possible spread of the virus.

Therefore, Mercy Ships has reviewed the activities associated with the *Africa Mercy* and made the decision to suspend the programmatic activities in Senegal.

The main concerns of Mercy Ships are the health of the Senegalese people and the safety and well-being of our own volunteers, crew and staff worldwide. Following the suspension of the programmatic activities, we are presently considering alternative ports for the *Africa Mercy*.

Annually the vessel undergoes routine maintenance and we currently are assessing how we can accelerate the commencement of that work. This would enable us to bring the *Africa Mercy* back to Africa once the immediate crises is over and continue our mission to bring Hope and Healing to the forgotten poor. Mercy Ships is also evaluating how the organization, given certain operational limitations, can be utilized to assist in the global COVID-19 response.

Have any COVID-19 infections been detected on the *Africa Mercy*?

Up to this point none of our patients nor crew onboard the *Africa Mercy* have presented with the COVID-19 infection. Crew shore leave was suspended and additional measures of hygiene and social interaction has been implemented in order to prevent infection onboard.

Why can't the Mercy Ships be deployed to help against Coronavirus Spread?

Although the *Africa Mercy* is a hospital ship, it is essentially a surgical specialist unit. The vessel is not suited to take care of patients with a highly contagious respiratory disease.

Mercy Ships relies on a volunteer staffing model using professional medical volunteers from around the world. The current unprecedented situation has presented a unique operational challenge as many of our medical volunteers have been asked to assist with the COVID -19 crisis in their home countries. In addition, the global air transport shutdown has resulted in our inability to continue to operate the hospital facility safely. Mercy Ships is also evaluating how the organization, given certain operational limitations, can be utilized to assist in the global COVID-19 response.

How are the patients onboard? What was accomplished in Senegal before the crisis hit?

The last patients and their caregivers left the vessel on March 23. Despite the suspension of our activities, we are grateful that during the *Africa Mercy's* 8-month stay (we had planned to be in Senegal for 10 months) in the port of Dakar, Republic of Senegal, Mercy Ships provided over 1,400 life-changing surgeries onboard (from the planned 1,200-1,700). Volunteer medical professionals treated over 5,500 dental patients (we had planned for 4,000) at a land-based dental clinic as well as provided healthcare training to 1,270 local medical professionals (initial plans were from 1,000 to 1,500) through mentoring and courses in partnership with 17 hospitals throughout Senegal.

How are the patients who cannot have surgery now?

This challenging situation worldwide means that some of our patients are now unable to have the surgery they had hoped for in Senegal. As we define options for our future programmatic activities in Africa, we take into account a possible return to Senegal to finish our mission once the restrictions ease.

What about the volunteers onboard?

After Mercy Ships reviewed the activities associated with the *Africa Mercy* and made the decision to suspend the programmatic activities in Senegal, no new patients were admitted. Following the decision not to take on further patients, a number of short-term crew volunteers and Senegalese day crew supported by Mercy Ships to return home to their countries and incoming volunteer travel cancelled. The crew onboard of the vessel today will sail the vessel to its next destination. We are grateful for their efforts in recent months in these uncertain times.

Is the *Africa Mercy* leaving Senegal and where is it going next?

Yes, the *Africa Mercy* is leaving Senegal two months earlier than planned to begin the ship's yearly maintenance according to maritime regulations. Our aim is to use this advanced maintenance to bring

the *Africa Mercy* back to Africa so that we can continue our mission to bring hope and healing to the forgotten poor once the restrictions ease.

Mercy Ships is also evaluating how, given our operational limitations, the ship can be utilized to assist in the global COVID-19 response

What can I do to support Mercy Ships at this time?

During this challenging season, we ask you to please pray for our crew and volunteers and for our offices around the world, many of whom are joining the ranks of those working from home and in lockdown situations within their countries. We also pray for our donors and friends around the world, knowing that these are uncertain times around the world. Your support, which is even more crucial now to help Mercy Ships so that we can continue provision of surgical care as soon as the situation permits.

Can I still reach the Mercy Ships Office in my country?

Yes, Mercy Ships Canada is still operating in accordance with the guidance and recommendations of the government health officials and our business continuity response actions for dealing with COVID-19.

Details available on the Mercy Ships Canada website <https://mercyships.ca/business-continuity-response-actions-of-mercy-ships-canada-for-dealing-with-covid-19/>

Staff e-mail and telephone answering service is be monitored. If you leave a message with your query and full details, one of the Mercy Ships staff will call or email you back as soon as possible.

Can I still visit the Mercy Ships office?

During the current pandemic, we have curtailed all visits to the Canadian office. Staff are working remotely as much as possible. As the situation is changing weekly around the world, we request that contact be made by telephone 1-866-900-7447 or email at msca@mercyships.ca.