



WCO actions to address the COVID-19 emergency

The fight to prevent the spread of COVID-19 has called for coordinated response at global level, where national governments, international organisations and businesses join forces. In a very short time, the pandemic has had a great impact on economies and societies. The global Customs community has as well recognised the challenge the world is facing and stepped up efforts to help minimize the overall impact of the COVID-19 outbreak and respond effectively to government and business needs. Recent measures of the World Customs Organization (WCO) to address the pandemic aim, on the one hand, to prevent the spread of the virus and, on the other hand, to safeguard supply-chain continuity.

The WCO has urged its 183 Member Customs administrations to facilitate the flow of goods and ensure the integrity of the global supply chain. The WCO has called for effective communication and a more coordinated and pro-active approach among WCO Members themselves, as well as with other relevant border agencies and international organisations. Notably, the WCO has also reached out to its business partners within the Private Sector Consultative Group (PSCG), of which FIATA is a member, to seek advice on the impact of COVID-19 from a trade perspective.

The WCO Secretariat has taken a number of actions to support WCO Members and stakeholders worldwide in tackling various COVID-19-related challenges. An overview of the WCO initiatives is provided below.

WCO dedicated COVID-19 webpage

The WCO Secretariat has established a [dedicated webpage](#) on the WCO website to keep WCO Members and the general public better informed about relevant developments in trade and Customs, as well as useful WCO tools, instruments and recommendations.

Temporary import support measures adopted by WCO Members

The WCO Secretariat has uploaded a [list](#) of national legislation of countries that have adopted temporary import support (lowering or waiving of direct and indirect taxes and duties) on certain categories of critical medical supplies in response to COVID-19. The list is not exhaustive and is regularly updated based on the official information provided by countries.

Temporary export control measures adopted by WCO Members

The WCO Secretariat has also uploaded a [list](#) of national legislation of countries that have adopted temporary export restrictions on certain categories of critical medical supplies in response to COVID-19. The list is not exhaustive and is regularly updated based on the official information provided by countries.

HS classification reference for COVID-19 medical supplies

In order to help countries to speed up the cross-border movement of critical medical supplies, the WCO, jointly with the World Health Organization (WHO), has revised its [HS Classification Reference for COVID-19 Medical Supplies](#).

The initial version of the list contained the classification of essential products needed such as COVID-19 diagnostic test kits and masks, certain protective personal equipment and medical devices such as ventilators and ECMO (extracorporeal membrane oxygenation), consumables and disinfectant products that may be used for the prevention and treatment of the disease. The revised edition expands that list to cover a greater range of medical equipment and supplies that are required as critical items by the WHO, such as oxygen concentrators and sample collection sets.

Please note that the list is provided as an indication only and includes a limited number of items. The list does not have legal status. The WCO advises to consult with the relevant Customs administration in relation to classification at domestic levels (7 or more digits) or in the event of any discrepancy between their practice and that list. All classifications are done under the current international HS – HS 2017.

WCO Members' practices in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

The WCO Secretariat has prepared an overview of Member Customs administrations' best practices to prevent and fight the spread of COVID-19, while safeguarding supply chain continuity. The overview of best practices is available on the [WCO dedicated COVID-19 webpage](#).

Additionally, the Secretariat has made available a [list of the highlights](#) of Members' practices, divided into four categories: facilitating the cross-border movement of relief and essential supplies; supporting the economy and sustaining supply chain continuity; protecting staff; and protecting society.

WCO Members emergency contact list

The WCO Secretariat has published a [list](#) with national Customs administrations' contact points for any inquiries regarding the import, export or transit of relief supplies relating to COVID-19.

Tackling counterfeit medical supplies

The WCO has reported significant increase in seizures of counterfeit and unauthorized face masks and hand sanitizers. The WCO has therefore issued a [notice](#) urging Member Customs administrations to be vigilant against counterfeit medical supplies. The notice has come after an alarming number of reports quoting seizures of counterfeit critical medical supplies, such as face masks and hand sanitizers.

The WCO has also [launched](#) a web-based communication system, the Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) CENcomm Group, for data exchange on counterfeit medical supplies and fake medicines which will assist Customs officers in the exchange of information.

Greater facilities requested for ATA Carnet procedures

The WCO has [encouraged](#) Contracting Parties to the Istanbul and ATA Conventions to provide sufficient facilities for ATA Carnet holders and representatives to re-export temporarily imported goods, without unexpected additional costs, in cases where delays in re-exporting were due to preventive measures taken by governments against the spread of the virus.

International Cooperation

Alongside the joint efforts of the WCO and the WHO to strengthen cooperation regarding the supply of critical medical supplies (see above point on HS classification reference for Covid-19 medical supplies), the WCO and the World Trade Organization (WTO) also [pledged](#) to work

together to minimise disruptions to cross-border flow of goods and establish a coordinated approach to support initiatives in that regard.

Additionally, the WCO Secretariat is in close contact and cooperation with the members of the Private Sector Consultative Group (PSCG), of which FIATA is a member. In order to assist the WCO in its efforts to address the COVID-19 crisis, the PSCG has developed a [Paper](#) that reflects the views of the private sector on the impact of the pandemic, including challenges faced by businesses globally and recommendations on relevant actions to the WCO Secretariat and Members to support the flow of goods across borders.

Other WCO instruments and tools

The WCO has further encouraged its Members to use as much as possible available WCO instruments and tools and recommended to apply relevant WCO standards and guidelines. Below is a list of relevant WCO tools:

- 2011 Resolution of the Customs Cooperation Council on the [Role of Customs in Natural Disaster Relief](#)
- [Guidelines to Chapter 5](#) of Specific Annex J to the [International Convention on the Simplification and Harmonization of Customs Procedures, as amended](#) (Revised Kyoto Convention)
- Annex B.9 to the [Convention on Temporary Admission](#) (Istanbul Convention)
- [Istanbul Convention Handbook](#)

FIATA will continue to monitor relevant developments and work closely with its members and international organisations to ensure a united and coordinated response to the COVID-19 crisis. FIATA further encourages members to bring the Paper of the PSCG to the attention of their national authorities and utilise, where possible, the available WCO tools to stay better informed and tackle COVID-19-related challenges.