



Information for seafarers undergoing medical examination

Medical assessment of fitness for duty at sea

Following release of a report into Occupational Health and Safety in the maritime industry, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority undertook a review of the medical fitness requirements for duty at sea. Guidelines were developed in line with changes recommended by the International Labour Office and World Health Organization.

The guidelines were developed to assist Doctors examining seafarers (Medical Inspectors) under Marine Orders Part 09 of the Navigation Act. Previously there were only limited guidelines and the text of Part 09 did not provide sufficient detail on medical conditions that may affect seafarers and the safety of their shipmates and ship. The guidelines reduce the risk of wrong decisions by basing the medical on a task analysis as well as general fitness.

Can I choose which Doctor I go to for a medical?

There are many suitably qualified Doctors around Australia who are appointed as Medical Inspectors, from whom you can choose. The Medical Inspectors have post-graduate training in occupational medicine and/or maritime experience. Normally, your employer will identify Medical Inspectors located near or in your home town, your base port, or a suitable location convenient to you. A list of Medical Inspectors is maintained by AMSA.

What does a medical examination involve?

Before the medical examination you must complete a questionnaire on your health. Copies of the questionnaire (titled "Medical Examination Report") are available on AMSA's web site: www.amsa.gov.au under the Marine Qualifications heading on the forms page or can be collected from your nearest AMSA office, or can be posted to you on a telephone request (Freecall 1800 021 098).

You should also get a "Medical Examination Request Form" from your employer, requesting that you be examined and the bill forwarded to your employer. Otherwise you will have to pay for the examination yourself.

At the examination you will be asked to:

- provide proof of identification (photo ID driving licence and/or passport)
- sign the declaration on the "Medical Examination Report" in the presence of the Medical Examiner
- bring with you any spectacles, contact lenses or hearing aids which you normally wear (chromagen, or colour tinted, spectacles or lenses are NOT allowed to be used during the examination)
- provide a urine sample for testing of diabetes and kidney disease (**not** drugs)
- if 55 years of age or older or if clinically indicated, an electrocardiogram (ECG)
- you may also be asked to have a hearing test (audiogram), lung function test or other tests if these are clinically indicated.

What disclosure is required about my health?

There are many questions asked about your health because there are many medical conditions that can affect how you do your job and which can also affect your safety and the safety of your shipmates. You cannot know all the medical conditions and their relevance to your job and safety so the questions are designed so that examining Doctors can assess these factors.

The questions are grouped by subject area, so you only need to indicate 'yes' or 'no' to a group. It will assist the doctor, however, if you underline the relevant items in a group to which you answer 'yes'.

Just because you answer 'yes' to a question does not mean you will not be able to go to sea. Some medical conditions need more frequent review (for example

a history of a previous heart attack) and some may require job restrictions (for example, a person with a pacemaker should not work on microwave and radar communications equipment). In general, the doctor will assess your fitness on the totality of your condition rather than on one aspect.

How often do I need to have a medical?

Generally, those who are less than 18, or 55 and older have annual medicals whilst everyone in between is examined at 2-yearly intervals.

If a medical condition is discovered which requires more frequent review you will be notified at the time of the examination.

What happens to the medical records?

You will receive the original of the *Certificate of Medical Fitness*. A copy will be sent to AMSA by the Doctor, who will retain the third copy. If the Doctor has a photocopier, you may ask him or her to send a copy to your employer, else your employer will request to make a copy for his/her records. Similarly a copy of the Medical Examination Report will be sent to AMSA, the Doctor should keep a copy, and he or she should give you a copy if you request this. You will be asked to acknowledge that you have been advised of the contents of the Medical Examination Report form. The easy way to do this is to provide a copy for you. It can only be released to third parties with your signed and informed consent.

What right of appeal have I got if I am dissatisfied with the outcome of my medical?

If you have been declared temporarily or permanently unfit for duty at sea you should first contact your employer for advice. The next step is to make an application for a second medical examination by a Medical Inspector of Seamen. If both concur as to your unfitness, an independent medical panel can be convened which may include an independent specialist in occupational medicine as well as a Doctor specialising in the disease/condition which has led to your classification as unfit for duty. At this stage you should provide full details to your Union and ask for its assistance. You may bring further evidence of your fitness for duty at sea from your own treating medical practitioners, and from your employer, if appropriate, for consideration by the independent medical panel.

The decision of the independent medical panel will be final. In certain cases the independent medical panel may declare you *temporarily unfit* and make arrangements for further review. Alternatively, you may be declared *fit for duties at sea*. If so, your condition may be subject to more frequent medical review.

If you are declared *permanently unfit for duties at sea*, you will be given advice in relation to vocational retraining, vocational rehabilitation or medical retirement, whichever is more appropriate in your circumstances.

Copies of Marine Order Part 9 can be obtained from AMSA's web site: www.amsa.gov.au