International Trade and COVID-19

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Editor's Note: This article also appears on the West Michigan District Export Council (W-DEC) website along with other resources to aid Michigan businesses pursuing export opportunities. Jean Schtokal is an international trade attorney at Foster Swift and has chaired the W-DEC since 2012. Dan Polkowski is the Export Compliance Manager for Imperial Clinical Research Service, Inc and also serves as a W-DEC Council Member.

Imports of Product

One of the questions we are getting from manufacturers and service providers is whether packages with product are safe if coming from an area where COVID-19 has been reported.


Is it safe to receive a package from an area where COVID-19 has been reported?

Yes. The likelihood of an infected person contaminating commercial goods is low and the risk of catching the virus that causes COVID-19 from a package that has been moved, travelled, and exposed to different conditions and temperatures is also low.

Also, here is the latest information for the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention with regard to this issue: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html

Am I at risk for a package or products shipping from China?

There is still a lot that is unknown about the newly emerged COVID-19 and how it spreads. Two other coronaviruses have emerged previously to cause severe illness in people (MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV). The virus that causes COVID-19 is more genetically related to SARS-CoV than MERS-CoV, but both are betacoronaviruses with their origins in bats.
While we don’t know for sure that this virus will behave the same way as SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV, we can use the information gained from both of these earlier coronaviruses to guide us. In general, because of poor survivability of these coronaviruses on surfaces, there is likely very low risk of spread from products or packaging that are shipped over a period of days or weeks at ambient temperatures. Coronaviruses are generally thought to be spread most often by respiratory droplets. Currently there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with imported goods and there have not been any cases of COVID-19 in the United States associated with imported goods. Information will be provided on the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) website as it becomes available.

To date, we are not aware of any package quarantine in place specifically with regard to COVID-19.

**Export of Product**

As of March 10, 2020, China is ramping back up production. Import flights will be packed full, which opens up a massive opportunity for EXPORTS! For example, FedEx added 6 flights inbound to handle the growing capacity. This leaves even more space for outbound volume to the Asia/Pacific region.

Commercial flights are down, but international air freight carriers are still in the AIR! At Imperial, we note for example that FedEx loaded new rates on March 10, 2020, and those rates will continue to be updated to match capacity during this fluctuating time. Rates now are more aggressive than they’ve ever been on a spot quote basis. Many carriers have links to obtain quotes. Here is a link we use at Imperial to obtain a spot quote from our carrier in less than an hour:
https://www.fedex.com/en-us/shipping/freight-services/international-air-freight-quote.html. At Imperial CRS Inc., we export FDA regulated commodities to over 100+ countries from our U.S. and U.K. locations. To date we continue to export without any issues. Monitoring of COVID-19 information is in review daily. For specific regions of the world where COVID-19 is more widely spread you should be checking with your couriers to monitor import capabilities. Specialized cold chain couriers for FDA regulated medicinal products continue to keep medical commodities moving on time for door-to-door global service.

**International Travel Restrictions Around the Globe**

We have all heard about recent travel restrictions in place from the US government. At Foster Swift, we have directed our business clients in need of information about global travel restrictions to the International Air Transport Association website. The website is helpful, and frequently updated. International Air Transport Association: https://www.iatatravelcentre.com/international-travel-document-news/1580226297.htm

**Small Business Administration (SBA) Disaster Assistance**

The SBA is also offering Disaster Assistance in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. The assistance includes low-interest federal disaster loans (up to $2 million) for working capital to small businesses suffering substantial economic injury as a result of COVID-19. The assistance is coordinated through requests from states. Here is a link to the SBA website providing more information: https://www.sba.gov/disaster-assistance/coronavirus-covid-19 and here is a link to the Michigan Small
Business Development Center website which will provide updates on efforts to release assistance for Michigan businesses https://sbdc.michigan.org/small-business-covid19/

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