

COVID-19 Vaccination Mandate Still an Issue Across the Sea Services



Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Joseph Casassa, assigned to USS Gerald R. Ford's (CVN 78) dental department, administers a COVID-19 vaccine at the McCormick Gym onboard Naval Station Norfolk, April 8, 2021. The Defense Department is now authorizing the use of Novavax COVID-19 vaccinations for service members. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Jackson Adkins*

ARLINGTON, Va. – Seven cadets at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy who refused to comply with the military's COVID-19 vaccination mandate were disenrolled and ordered off the school's New London, Connecticut, campus in late August.

“While the seven cadets have been disenrolled, they have not been separated from the Coast Guard Academy and are continuing to receive cadet pay and entitlements until their separation

is processed," the Coast Guard said in a statement sent to *Seapower* Sept. 8.

Two days after Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's Aug. 24, 2021, mandate requiring COVID-19 vaccine for all service members to protect the force and maintain readiness, the Coast Guard announced a vaccination requirement.

Fifteen cadets filed medical exemption or religious accommodation requests in September 2021. They were evaluated on a case-by-case basis by the Coast Guard's Office of Military Personnel Policy and denied. The 15 cadets were notified March 14, 2022, and given 10 business days to file an appeal. The appeals were denied by Coast Guard Headquarters and all 15 were directed to report to the Academy clinic for their first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. Four chose vaccination, four others resigned from the Academy, the Coast Guard said.

On June 13, the remaining seven cadets were told they were "in violation of the Uniform Code of Military Justice Article 90, Willfully disobeying a superior commissioned officer, and Article 92, Failure to obey [an] order or regulation," according to the statement. They were given an additional five days to comply. On June 22, they were notified of their disenrollment and given a chance to appeal to Coast Guard Headquarters. The cadets were notified Aug. 15 their disenrollment appeals were denied and were directed "to proceed to an alternate worksite status beginning on August 19th, 2022."

All seven "departed the Academy at their own convenience on August 19" based on their individual travel arrangements assisted by Academy staff. "All seven cadets are currently residing at a safe location, having either returned to their families or are being hosted by the families of fellow cadets," according to the Coast Guard statement.

Several federal lawsuits are challenging the military's process for granting religious exemptions from the vaccination mandate, including two in South Carolina and Texas involving some of the dismissed Coast Guard cadets.

Almost 5,000 Sailors and Marines have been separated from the sea services since late 2021 for vaccination refusal. The Navy has received 4,251 for religious accommodation, the Marines 3,733. Only a handful have been approved. However, a federal judge in Texas certified a class action by Sailors, including several Navy SEALs, seeking a religious exemption and issued a preliminary injunction March 30, halting separation for members of the class. A similar injunction was issued against the Marine Corps Aug. 18 by a federal judge in Florida.

A coalition of more than 20 state attorneys general has filed an amicus brief before the 5th U.S. Court of Appeals, supporting the religious liberty claims of Navy SEALs seeking exemptions from the mandatory vaccination requirement in the Texas case. While lower courts have blocked separation of vaccine refusers, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled the Navy could consider a Sailor's vaccination status in making deployment and other operational decisions while court challenges move through the system.

As of Aug. 31, the latest Defense Department COVID-19 statistics, 1.99 million service members have been fully vaccinated, including 387,477 in the Navy and 200,435 in the Marine Corps.

Nevertheless, as of Aug. 24, 3,000 active duty Sailors and 3,376 in the Ready Reserve remain unvaccinated. The Marine Corps' latest COVID update doesn't give specific figures, only stating that as of Aug. 4, just 5% of both the active duty and the reserve force were not vaccinated.

Novavax Arrives

In a related development, the Defense Department announced Aug. 29 a new COVID-19 vaccine, Novavax, will be available as an option at military clinics. Officials hope Novavax, which is approved by the Food and Drug Administration under an emergency use authorization for individuals 12 years of age and older, may be more acceptable to the thousands of troops who have refused the Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines for religious or moral reasons.

Novavax uses technology that has been used in other vaccines required by the military, like hepatitis B vaccine. Novavax is not made with, or tested on, cells from fetal tissue. It does not use mRNA or DNA technology and does not enter the nucleus of cells, Pentagon officials said.

“We now have a range of COVID-19 vaccines available at our military medical treatment facilities and they all provide strong protection against hospitalization, severe illness and death,” Dr. Michael Malanoski, deputy director of the Defense Health Agency, said in a statement. However, as in the early days of the three other vaccines, the FDA’s emergency use authorization approval means service members cannot be compelled to take Novavax.

Corps Discharging 103 Marines for Refusing COVID vaccine; Navy to Separate Sailors Who Stay Unvaccinated



Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Cory Troche, left, assigned to the “Blue Blasters” of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 34, administers a COVID-19 booster vaccination to Aviation Electronics Mate 3rd Class Mark Galloway, assigned to the “Sunliners” of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 81, aboard the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75).
U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication 3rd Class Bela Chambers

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Marine Corps has discharged 103 Marines for refusing to be vaccinated against the coronavirus COVID-19, officials announced Dec. 16.

“Per Marine Corps policy (MARADMINs 462/21, 533/21, and 612/21), any active-duty Marine and Ready Reserve Marine in an active duty status who did not receive a final vaccination dose by Nov. 14 is considered unvaccinated,” Maj. Jim Stenger, a Marine Corps spokesperson, said in a statement. “All unvaccinated Marines without a pending or approved administrative exemption, medical exemption, or religious accommodation, or appeal, will be processed for administrative separation.”

Marine Corps guidance directed units to document a specific code in the Marine Corps Total Force System upon separation for vaccine refusal. "To date, 103 Marines have been separated from the Marine Corps with the vaccine refusal discharge code," Stenger's statement noted.

The Marines' decision came a day after the Navy announced plans to remove Sailors who refuse to comply with the Navy's vaccine mandate. In addition to separation from the service, Sailors and officers rejecting vaccination will not be eligible to promote or advance. Enlisted personnel will not be able to re-enlist and could lose education benefits and bonus pay. As of Dec. 16, 2021, 5,472 active component Sailors remain unvaccinated, according to the Navy.

The Navy removed the executive officer of the Arleigh Burke-class missile destroyer USS Winston S. Churchill for rejecting COVID vaccination and refusing to be tested for the virus.

In late August, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, with the approval of President Joe Biden, ordered mandatory COVID vaccines for all U.S. military personnel. Both the Navy and Marine Corps set a Nov. 28 deadline for active duty Sailors and Marines to be fully vaccinated.

"The Marine Corps recognizes COVID-19 as a readiness issue. The speed with which the disease transmits among individuals has increased risk to our Marines and the Marine Corps' mission," Stenger's statement says.

As of Dec. 15, 94% of the active duty Marine Corps is fully vaccinated, with 95% at least partially vaccinated. Marine Corps Reserve components account for 81% fully vaccinated and 84% at least partially vaccinated. That was a big jump from Nov. 5, when Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger expressed concern that 56% of Marines in the Ready Reserve had not been vaccinated and faced a Dec. 28 deadline to do so. "We are one Marine Corps, active duty and Reserve, so it is

important for them to get vaccinated as well,” Berger said.

Both the Marine Corps and the Navy require active and reserve component service members to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19, unless medically or administratively exempt. The Marines report there have been 1,007 approved exemptions.

There have been 3,144 requests for religious accommodation to avoid the COVID-19 vaccine mandate. At this time, 2,863 have been processed and zero requests have been approved, according to Stenger.

The Navy has granted seven permanent medical exemptions, 296 temporary medical exemptions, 216 administrative exemptions and zero religious accommodation requests for vaccine exemptions. None of the 2,751 active-duty requests for a religious accommodation from COVID immunization have been granted.

Seven Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard Facilities in DoD COVID-19 Vaccination Pilot



Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs Thomas McCaffery speaks in a media briefing with Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs Jonathan R. Hoffman (Right), and Army Lt. Gen. Ronald J. Place, Defense Health Agency director, about the Defense Department’s phased, standardized, and coordinated strategy for distribution and administering COVID-19 vaccines, the Pentagon, Washington, D.C., Dec. 9, 2020. DoD / Air Force Staff Sgt. Brittany A. Chase

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Defense Department will start a COVID-19 vaccination pilot program at 16 facilities in the United States and overseas, as soon as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) grants emergency authorization, which is expected in the next few days, Pentagon officials said Dec 9.

Vaccination, which will be voluntary as long as the department is operating under an Emergency Use Authorization from the FDA, could start distributing almost 44,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine, the military's expected share of a limited initial production, "as early as next week for immediate use," Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs Thomas McCaffery told reporters at a live-streamed Pentagon briefing.

The phase-in of other prioritized personnel at additional locations will continue until 60% of Defense Department personnel, about 11 million, have received the vaccine. By then, the department assumes vaccine production will have ramped up enough to permit unrestricted vaccination rates.

The first phase of voluntary vaccinations will target the coronavirus pandemic's first responders: Healthcare providers and support staff, emergency services, and public safety personnel at Military Treatment Facilities. At first, only a very small percentage of those first vaccinations will go to critical national capabilities forces, such as the long range bombers, ballistic missile submarines and land-based missiles that make up the nuclear deterrence triad, officials said. In the meantime, mandatory counter-COVID-19 procedures such as wearing a face-covering, social distancing and quarantining before and after deployments will remain in force, they added.



The initial vaccine distribution sites. DoD

The 16 vaccination sites were picked because they had extra cold storage capability for the temperature-sensitive vaccines, sizeable local populations to vaccinate and large medical staffs, including an on-site immunization health

specialist, said Director of the Defense Health Agency Army Lt. Gen. Ronald Place.

The 13 vaccination sites in the continental United States include several Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard facilities: Navy Branch Health Clinic at Naval Air Station Jacksonville, and the Naval Hospital Pensacola, both in Florida; the Alameda Health Services clinic at the Coast Guard Base Alameda, the Naval Medical Center at San Diego, the Naval Hospital at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, all in California; Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, Bethesda, Maryland and the U.S. Coast Guard Base Clinic, Portsmouth, Virginia.

The Pentagon announcement came eight days after a Navy reservist assigned to Navy Operational Support Center Akron, Ohio, died at a local hospital in Canton, Ohio from apparent complications associated with the coronavirus.

Builder 2ns Class Nathan Huff Bishop, 33, a Seabee, was only the second Sailor to succumb to COVID-19 despite widespread spikes in infection and death rates across the country. The first was Chief Petty Officer Robert Thacker Jr., 41, assigned to USS Theodore Roosevelt, the first Navy vessel to suffer a COVID-19 outbreak at sea. He died in April at the U.S. Naval Hospital on Guam. As of Dec. 2, a total of 17,035 uniformed Navy personnel have tested positive for COVID-19 in 2020, 14,217 have recovered, nine remain hospitalized and two have died.

Pentagon Leaders Say

Preparing for a Biological Attack is Among Lessons Learned from Pandemic



Naval Aircrewmen (Tactical Helicopter) 2nd Class Isaac Lynn with Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron 37 attached to the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS William P. Lawrence, verifies his information with U.S. Army Capt. Danielle Crawford, Joint Task Force-Bravo Combat Support Hospital commander prior to a COVID test at Soto Cano Air Base, Honduras, Nov. 26. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Russell Scoggin

ARLINGTON, Va. – Among the lessons learned from the coronavirus pandemic is a better understanding of what it will take to defend against a biological attack or other weapons of mass destruction, leaders of the U.S. Navy and Defense departments said Dec. 2.

“We are today a better force, prepared for nuclear, biological, chemical warfare in the future because of the lessons we’ve learned from this pandemic,” Navy Secretary Kenneth Braithwaite told a Senate hearing on Navy and Marine Corps readiness.

The novel coronavirus, COVID-19, “caught the [Navy] Department off-guard, as it did the entire world,” Braithwaite told Senate Armed Services Committee’s Readiness and Management Support subcommittee, adding, “the Navy in particular struggled through the early weeks of this because the close proximity in which our Sailors live aboard ship made this a real threat to our ability to operate at sea.”

He praised Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael Gilday for identifying ways to mitigate the risk and “keep our ships operating. We have over 100 ships today at sea.”

In a separate, live-streamed discussion the same day at a Washington think tank, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley said it wasn't likely a nation state would attack the United States with a biological weapon but he was more concerned that a terrorist organization might try.

"We know some organizations are, in fact, looking into that," Milley told viewers on the Brookings Institution's website. "They don't have that yet, but it's something that's a possibility, something we need to be on guard against."

In addition to "interdicting, disrupting and destroying any capability" to weaponize a virus or other disease, Milley said "we also need to take the lessons learned from this current pandemic and roll those into capabilities to defend ourselves," including stockpiles of PPE (personal protective equipment), organizations capable of rapid deployment, protocols and procedures to limit the effects of any biological weapon.

"We have a very rigorous lessons learned program ongoing with the current crisis," he added.

At the Senate hearing, Gilday said the Pentagon is working closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on two plans to distribute COVID-19 vaccine. Ten Defense Department locations across the continental United States will distribute Pfizer's vaccine, which must be stored at minus 70 degrees Celsius. Three or four overseas locations will distribute the Moderna vaccine, which only requires refrigeration at minus 20 degrees Celsius for up to 30 days before use.

The vaccination plan grew out of lessons learned from the Defense Department's tiered COVID-19 testing program, Gilday said. It calls for health care and emergency and safety personnel to be vaccinated first because they're more likely to be in contact with the infected, strategic forces, such as

the crews on nuclear missile submarines, followed by forces to be deployed within the next three months.

COVID-19 Shows Importance of Ship Self-Sufficiency at Sea, Surface Force Chief Says



Sailors aboard the guided-missile cruiser USS San Jacinto handle line as the ship moors in Naval Station Norfolk after a regularly scheduled deployment. The ship was away from port for more than 200 days. U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Colbey Livingston

ARLINGTON, Va. – One lesson learned from the challenge of the novel coronavirus pandemic is that U.S. Navy ships and their crews need to be self-reliant and work with the equipment and skills on hand, the commander of Naval Surface Force Atlantic said, noting the unexpected 200-plus days the guided-missile cruiser USS San Jacinto spent at sea.

“From an equipment perspective, if there’s any silver lining to the COVID-19 pandemic, it’s Sailor self-sufficiency in our ability to maintain our equipment at a higher level,” Rear Adm. Brad Cooper told the Surface Navy Association’s 1st Virtual Waterfront Symposium.

He noted the 32-year-old San Jacinto, escort to the aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, was away from port for more than 200 days. “That’s an unimaginable number,” Cooper said during a live-streamed question-and-answer session on Aug. 25.

COVID-19 “has forced us to be a lot more self-sufficient,” he said, adding “and boy were they self-sufficient.”

Both ships left Norfolk Naval Station on Jan. 17 for the carrier strike group's composite training unit exercise and follow-on deployment. They did not return to Norfolk until Aug. 9, partly to escape the spread of COVID-19 – which sidelined the carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt for months – but also to maintain maritime stability and security, deter aggression and defend U.S. and allies' interests in the 5th and 6th Fleets' areas of operations.

“If there's any silver lining to the COVID-19 pandemic, it's Sailor self-sufficiency in our ability to maintain our equipment at a higher level.”

Rear Adm. Brad Cooper

Uncertainty posed by COVID-19 also showed the need to change from a Monday through Friday initial training schedule, Cooper said. Earlier this year, Surface Naval Force Atlantic shifted to a pilot program, Afloat Training Groups (ATG) Rodeo, where three ships stayed out at sea conducting drills, planning exercises, executing them and debriefing for three uninterrupted weeks, instead of coming back to on the weekends.

“As we look to the future, that's the model we're going to use in the Surface Force in both [Atlantic and Pacific] fleets,” Cooper said. Six ships coming out of maintenance and going into basic phase in the next few months are going to follow that training procedure, Cooper said.

He said leaders in the fleet must have “exquisite knowledge” of the condition of their equipment to meet Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday's top priority: operational readiness. But they also need to know their crew members even better to meet their No. 1 priority: People. A key component to that is training, he said.

A day after the massive July fire that seriously damaged the

assault ship USS Bonhomme Richard pier-side in San Diego, Cooper explained, he sent guidance to his commanders to do “a gut check” that their firefighting kill chain is “fully intact and you know how to exercise it down to the weakest link.”

When something happens, Cooper said, every single member of a ship’s fire party “has to know, where do they go, what’s the status of the equipment and what’s their responsibility.”

Elbit Subsidiary to Evaluate Navy Ventilator for COVID-19 Combat



Lt. Cmdr. Michael Heimes, a Sailor with Expeditionary Medical Facility-M, checks on a patient connected to a ventilator during an ICU night shift at Baton Rouge General Mid City campus on April 28. A Navy ventilator design is one of five being evaluated by a Pentagon-selected company for use to combat COVID-19. U.S. MARINE CORPS / Cpl. Daniel R. Betancourt Jr.

ARLINGTON, Va. – A subsidiary of Elbit Systems of America has been selected by a Defense Department team of medical professionals and engineers, to support the development and industrialization of ventilator designs – including one by the U.S. Navy – to help combat COVID-19 affliction.

Merrimack, New Hampshire-based KMC Systems Inc. is assessing five designs for low-cost, ready- for-production ventilators, picked by the department’s “Hack-a-Vent Challenge” in June. KMC is assessing the five for simplicity of manufacture and availability of components. KMC was selected for the task by

the Defense Health Agency, U.S. Air Force Rapid Capabilities Office and the Wright Brothers Institute, due to its experience designing and manufacturing in a U.S. Food and Drug Administration-regulated environment, the company said in an Aug. 20 statement.

“KMC has specialized in design and manufacturing for some of the leading medical devices and life-sciences companies for the last four decades,” said Raanan Horowitz, president and CEO of Elbit Systems of America, itself a subsidiary of Israeli defense contractor, Elbit Systems Ltd.

Leveraging the U.S. Special Operations Command digital platform, Vulcan, the “Hack-a-Vent Challenge” solicited crowdsourced proposals to build domestically sourced ventilators that would be portable, smaller than a traditional ventilator, and operational for under \$500, providing a solution to rural communities and foreign partners. Five were selected out of 172 submissions.

The five prototypes include the CorVent by Coridea, BLU3 Vent by BLU3, iBreather by L3 Harris, FieldVent by Northrop Grumman, and the NAVSEA PRE-Vent by the Navy. The NAVSEA team – made up of U.S. Navy engineering, diving and life support, and biomedical research experts – kept their functional solution’s cost at \$300.

The Navy team managed to provide many of the features of an intensive care unit ventilator without the reliance on the established medical supply chain by using sensors from the diving industry and the microcontroller enthusiast community.

The NAVSEA team also used 3-D printing to bridge compatibility gaps between those sensors and all standard aerosol, CPAP (Continuous Positive Airway Pressure) and BiPAP (Bilevel Positive Airway Pressure) hoses. They also included an uninterruptable power supply with battery backup.

Tiered COVID-19 Testing System Exceeding Weekly Goal, Pentagon Says



U.S. Marines with Marine Rotational Force-Darwin arrive to Royal Australian Air Force Base Darwin, Australia, on July 24 and undergo testing for COVID-19. U.S. MARINE CORPS / Cpl. Sarah Marshall

ARLINGTON, Va. – The tiered system for testing of U.S. military personnel for COVID-19, considered a key element in defeating the novel coronavirus, has exceeded the goal of 56,000 tests per week, Defense Department officials told Pentagon reporters on July 30.

Not only has the program exceeded the 56,000 tests-per-week goal set in May, the Defense Department has been administering nearly 60,000 tests per week for several months, said Air Force Major Gen. Lee E. Payne, assistant director for combat support at the Defense Health Agency and a medical doctor.

“We’ve seen testing increase five-fold in the last three months, and to date, we’ve conducted over 540,000 tests since January,” said Lee, who also leads the Pentagon’s diagnostic and testing task force.

Defense Department personnel are testing positive for COVID-19 at lower rates than the general population, except for the 18- to 24-year-old age group, said Air Force Brig. Gen. Paul Friedrichs, the Joint Chiefs of Staff surgeon. The reason is not attributable to young people’s behavior, but because they are the largest demographic group across the U.S. armed services and are tested more, especially those who are

incoming recruits, he added.

The Defense Department unveiled the priority-based, four-tiered system on April 22, when the department's testing ability was limited by equipment shortages and slow turnarounds on test results. Tier 1 targeted critical national-security capabilities, like strategic nuclear deterrent units. Tier 2 focused on engaged, fielded forces around the world, while Tier 3 was for testing forward-deployed and redeploying forces. The remainder of the military makes up Tier 4.

Even with the rise in testing, infection rates for COVID-19 among active-duty military have held steady for several weeks at 5.7%, Payne said. The cumulative number of service personnel hospitalized for COVID-19 has been far less than the number diagnosed with the virus and far less than medical experts expected in January and February, Friedrichs noted.

"There were a lot of unknowns" about COVID-19 back then, he said, adding, "We have a lot more knowledge today about how to treat those infected."

Reinventing 'Normal': Long-Term Rules Settle Into Place for Prolonged Siege Against Virus



Masked U.S. Navy recruits march in formation on June 2 at Recruit Training Command in Great Lakes, Illinois. U.S. NAVY /

Seaman Apprentice Mikal Chapman

The aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, victimized this spring by a COVID-19 outbreak, is back home in San Diego and seemingly healthy. U.S. Marines, no longer using their T-shirts as face masks, are rotating back to Australia but with strict disease-prevention measures in place. U.S. Navy ships and crews have resumed annual exercises with allies and partner nations – but at sea only, with no contact on shore. A “new normal” has settled into place. No one knows just how long this will last.

In the seven months since the novel coronavirus surfaced in China and spread to Europe, the U.S. sea services appear to have fought the contagion to a stand-still. Even as case numbers spike throughout the homeland, especially in the Sun Belt, they appear to be static in the military, at least among uniformed personnel.

Check out the digital edition of the July-August *Seapower* magazine and other past issues [here](#).

While the virus has sickened 3 million stateside and killed about 132,000, the Navy has reported more than 4,300 cases – many of those on two ships, the Theodore Roosevelt and the USS Kidd. One Sailor has died. The U.S. Marine Corps reported another 1,600 infections among uniformed personnel, though an outbreak occurred among dozens of Marines at two bases on Okinawa.

Commanders, meanwhile, are strategizing how to operate in all this and keep the numbers down while demanding focus as always on the mission at hand.

CNO Cautions Against Returning to the ‘Old Normal’

In a June 30 message to the fleet, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday stressed “the importance of remaining vigilant” in the Navy’s long-term battle against COVID-19.

“Each of us will be faced with temptations to cut corners and return to the ‘old normal.’ Do not do it. Together, we will rigorously maintain health protection measures to protect our Navy family and assure mission success even when it may appear the [American public] may be relaxing them,” he added.

Some measures put in place during the initial response to the pandemic this spring may last longer. Case in point: any event that requires a large gathering.



Machinist Mate (Auxiliary) 1st Class Sean Riebel, assigned to Trident Refit Facility, Bangor, Washington, is tested for COVID-19 on July 6 at Naval Hospital Bremerton. U.S. NAVY / Douglas H. Stutz

The sea services came up with virtual alternatives to graduation ceremonies of new Marines, Sailors and Coast Guard grads. The U.S. Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, was the latest institution to join the trend on June 24. Instead of parading in dress uniforms on historic Dewey Field, the 427 students who earned diplomas gathered virtually to hear recorded speakers.

Interviews with prospective recruits and Fleet Week events around the country are being conducted online. Mandated measures governing training and operations include expanded testing of personnel, isolating crews before and after they go to sea, stringent and frequent cleaning of work and living space, social distancing of at least 6 feet – when possible –and wearing face coverings when it is not. Masks will be a regular part of Navy, Marine and Coast Guard attire for the foreseeable future.

Returning to Normal Operations, but Still Vigilant

A sign that the sea services are emerging from a 24/7 emergency mindset came from Navy Reserve Force, which issued new guidance in June for Reservists to resume regular weekend onsite drills beginning in mid-July, pending evaluation of

local conditions and guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The Navy also began resuming exercises around the world, including BALTOPS 20, a multinational, maritime exercise in the Baltic Sea with 19 NATO and partner nations; U.S. Navy and Georgian Forces conducting maneuvering exercises in the Black Sea; and the Bataan Amphibious Ready Group and the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit conducting a maritime training exercise with Italian and French ships and aircraft in the Mediterranean Sea. Meanwhile, aircraft carrier strike groups have continued to deploy in the Pacific and Atlantic as well as the Mediterranean and the Arctic.

“Each of us will be faced with temptations to cut corners and return to the ‘old normal.’ Do not do it.”

CNO Adm. Mike Gilday, in a June 30 message to the fleet

Despite the constraints imposed by the global health crisis, the Navy and U.S. Coast Guard did not stop patrolling the eastern Pacific and Caribbean during U.S. Southern Command’s fight against transnational narcotics trafficking. As one example, the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Preble, with a Coast Guard law enforcement detachment on board, recovered 100 bales of suspected cocaine with an estimated street value of \$40 million, according to Coast Guard sources. Many more drug and migrant interdictions – both as part of the Navy-USCG partnership and by the Coast Guard alone – still are taking place routinely.

Virus Prevention Procedures Begin at Boot Camp

Strict adherence to those COVID-19 preventive guidelines is responsible for the continued flow of Navy and Marine Corps recruits into boot camp, according to the commanders of the services’ basic training commands.

Both the Navy and Marines have implemented 14-day restrictions

of movement, where incoming recruits are quarantined off-site when they arrive at the Marine Corps Recruit Depots at San Diego and Parris Island, South Carolina, and at Navy Recruit Training Command at Great Lakes, Illinois. After 14 days the recruits are tested for COVID-19. If they test negative, they can start basic training. If they pop positive results, they isolate in a single room for monitoring and more testing.

Quarantining recruits in off-base facilities – like The Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina, for the Marines or hotels outside Chicago for the Navy – is costly, and both services are looking for long-term alternatives.

More than 8,100 new Sailors have been sent to the fleet during the pandemic, and 6,700 recruits are currently going through Great Lakes, Rear Adm. Milton J. Sands, commander of Naval Service Training Command, told media during a July 7 teleconference. He added that the Navy was on track to meet its goal of 40,800 new Sailors in the current fiscal year.

Speaking at the same briefing, Maj. Gen. William F. Mullen, commander of Marine Training and Education Command, said the number of recruits per company have been reduced at San Diego and Parris Island because of special distancing requirements.



A masked drill instructor with Oscar Company, 4th Recruit Training Battalion, adjusts her Marine's cover as the platoon conducts their final uniform inspection on Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, South Carolina, on May 1. U.S. MARINE CORPS / Sgt. Dana Beesley

That and some weeks left open without scheduled shipments of new recruits in case unforeseen COVID-19 problems back up the pipeline are expected to cut into the Corps' goal of 38,000 new Marines this fiscal year. The traditional 10-day leave new Marines used to get after boot camp graduation has been canceled to keep them in the protective bubble before starting their follow-on training, Mullen said.

Concern for the Sub Fleet Leads to Innovative Measures

Norfolk, Virginia-based Submarine Squadron 6 (SUBRON 6) developed a COVID-19 plan that set the standard for Atlantic attack sub deployment with total assurance that crew are free of infection.

SUBRON 6 Commodore Capt. Jeffrey Juergens called the effort to man, train and equip his fleet of 15 attack subs homeported or undergoing maintenance at Norfolk in a COVID-free bubble “wholly unprecedented” in his Navy career. “Our medical and operations departments put together a testing regime, made sure they had the most up-to-date guidance, and knew what to do in case we had someone test positive,” Juergens said.

He credited Senior Chief Electronics Technician (Submarine) Joshua Sisk with much of the plan’s heavy lifting, like managing repairs and parts delivery on the pier without crew interaction.

“We’re now getting lots of phone calls from our counterparts to share lessons learned. Until further notice, this will be the new norm,” Sisk said.

Guam, Other Bases Become Safe Havens

Naval Base Guam is among the facilities designated safe-haven ports for Navy ships and subs. The base is equipped to resupply vessels piersonside while protecting ships and service members. In this bubble, Sailors can enjoy mental and physical relaxation while their vessel is serviced. Also, on Guam, visiting crew members have access to a secured beach. Other safe-haven ports include Okinawa, Japan, and Naval Station Rota, Spain.

The safe-haven port concept grew out of the lessons learned from the ordeal of the USS Theodore Roosevelt, the first naval warship hit with an outbreak at sea. More than 1,100 crew members tested positive while the aircraft carrier was

sidelined on Guam for more than two months as it was clean and sanitized from bow to stern and sick crew treated.

Thanks to procedures put in place on Guam, the carrier put to sea in June to resume its deployment to the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations and returned safely to homeport in San Diego on July 9.

The Coast Guard's Own COVID-19 Challenges



Masked members of the cutter James crew and Commandant Adm. Karl L. Schultz (front, center), along with interagency partners, stand among interdicted narcotics at Port Everglades, Florida, on June 9. U.S. COAST GUARD / Petty Officer 3rd Class Brandon Murray

All of the U.S. armed forces have been heavily impacted by the novel coronavirus – perhaps none more acutely than the U.S. Coast Guard.

A service focused on activities such as rescuing stranded boaters, apprehending criminals and boarding vessels for inspection has a lot of the human-to-human contact that everyone is trying to limit due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the service is having to walk a tightrope these days.

Check out the digital edition of the July-August *Seapower* magazine and other past issues [here](#).

Coast Guard spokesperson Lt. Cmdr. Brittany Panetta told *Seapower* that the sea service is working hard to properly balance the safety of Coast Guardsmen with continuing operations that are entirely necessary.

The Coast Guard ramped up counter-drug operations in support of U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) following an April 1 presidential directive, as the pandemic began to take hold worldwide.

In the meantime, the service has formed a coronavirus coordination team (CCT) that is working to improve productivity, share information and remove “unnecessary burdens” to ensure “mission readiness for Coast Guard personnel and their families,” Panetta said.

Now’s No Time for the Coast Guard to Lower Its Guard

As many governments stateside relax measures during the pandemic – even in several places where case numbers are skyrocketing – there is no timeline in the Coast Guard for easing mitigation measures due to COVID-19. In fact, the service is taking an aggressive approach to ensure Coast Guard personnel follow all guidelines when it comes to the virus and personally do their part to stop the spread, Panetta said.

“In [off-duty risk management], we expect members to employ a similar risk-based decision approach to off-duty behavior,” reads a July 1 directive posted on the Coast Guard website. “This health care crisis is not over, and the Coast Guard is not immune to the increasing COVID-19 cases occurring across the nation.”

“You’re going to have to interact with [people from interdicted vessels], and you don’t have a good idea of their medical history.”

Capt. Jeffrey Randall, commanding officer of the cutter James

That means all personnel are expected to “carefully consider” the risks of engaging in certain activities. Specifically, the Coast Guard should consider three fundamental COVID-19-related risk criteria: the physical location of the activity (indoors

is a greater risk), the number and expected behavior of others at that location (proper spacing and mask-wearing) and the duration of time in close contact of others (contact that is longer than 10 minutes and within 6 feet is a high risk).

Interdicting People Who Are Possibly Infected

Capt. Jeffrey Randall, commanding officer of the Legend-class national security cutter James, told *Seapower* in an interview that his ship spends about 70 to 90 days at sea twice per year, and the most recent trip departed in early April and returned about 65 days later. The crew did a few stops, but just anchored off the coasts of Colombia, Ecuador, and Panama and avoided port visits as a COVID-19 mitigation measure.

The ship was involved in counter-narcotics work, which always carries a risk of virus exposure because the crew has to interact with people on vessels from places unknown who are suspected of running drugs.

“You’re going to have to interact with them, and you don’t have a good idea of their medical history,” Randall said.

“So, we have processes in place. When we go to send a boarding party to do an inspection of a vessel, they’re wearing masks, gloves, long sleeves, and sunglasses or eyeglasses. Then once we stop the vessel, we’re going to ask some questions and observe for visible symptoms, then we’ll conduct a boarding of the vessel with personal protective equipment on.”

Once the boarding party returns, they have a team that decontaminates the weapons, body armor and the people themselves. “All of their stuff stays on the outside of the skin of the ship,” Randall said.



Coast Guard Cutter Tern crew members transfer a cruise ship Grand Princess passenger in her mid-70s and her husband to EMS personnel awaiting at Coast Guard Sector San Francisco on March 7. U.S. COAST GUARD / Petty Officer 3rd Class Taylor

Bacon

The crew has had risky encounters, coming across two separate groups of detainees who ended up testing positive for COVID-19. Fortunately, because of the processes on board, nobody from the crew came down with the illness.

But there's always risk. Even if the crew does everything right on ship, there's still the question of how they handle themselves after a deployment. That's why the Coast Guard also implements safety measures such as a restriction of movement for 14 days prior, limiting the crew to only the most essential activities like going to the grocery store. The crew of the James is tested for COVID-19 before the ship departs.

"They basically have a self-isolation order," Randall said, adding that the crew aims to finish all work requirements at least two weeks before deployment to limit the exposure of the crew during that critical period.

COVID-19 hasn't limited operations but has crews have to be more methodical. The James also has a team of eight people who deal exclusively with detainees and are in a separate berthing area of the cutter.

Okinawa COVID-19 Spread Slows as Marines Phase in More Aggressive Testing



Okinawa Prefectural Government representatives meet with Marine Corps Installations Pacific leadership and health professionals to discuss COVID-19 information at Camp Foster Naval Hospital. The parties present agreed to continue openly

communicating and meeting regularly via teleconference to ensure proper protective measures are met. U.S. MARINE CORPS / Lance Cpl. Karis Mattingly

ARLINGTON, Va. – U.S. Marine Corps leaders on Okinawa have relaxed restrictions for some essential off-base activities as the spread of COVID-19 on the island has slowed and U.S. military headquarters in Japan ordered a more rigorous novel coronavirus testing policy for personnel arriving on the island.

On July 29, Okinawa-based Marine Corps Installations Pacific (MCIPAC) reported that no one affiliated with the Marines on the island – uniformed, family member, or civilian employee – had tested positive for COVID-19 in the previous 24 hours. “We are still testing some groups and will be testing close contacts before they can exit quarantine,” Maj. Kenneth Kunze, an MCIPAC spokesman, said in a July 29 statement e-mailed to *Seapower*.

“Leadership is confident that we have contained the outbreak and are working hard to continue to mitigate the spread as the number of cases within the civilian population continues to rise on Okinawa and service members and families continue to [permanent change of station] to the island.”

Also on July 29, U.S. Forces-Japan, a component of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command overseeing all U.S. defense issues in Japan, directed all Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) personnel to undergo COVID-19 exit tests prior to release from the 14-day restriction of movement (ROM) already required of all new arrivals, including military, civilians, families and contractors.

“Leadership is confident that we have contained the outbreak and are working hard to continue to mitigate the spread as the number of cases within the civilian population continues to rise on Okinawa and service members and families continue to PCS to the island.”

Maj. Kenneth Kunze, MCIPAC spokesman

Exit testing will be done between day 10 and 14 of the ROM requirement, and individuals must complete their full 14 days of isolation, regardless of the test result. Individuals testing positive will move from ROM into isolation. Component commanders were directed to develop and implement safety procedures for the new testing. Japanese officials in Okinawa and Tokyo have complained that the U.S. military was not doing enough to ensure all their arrivals from overseas were being tested.

On July 28, the Marines loosened some restrictions on off-base activities on Okinawa, which has been under stricter health protection rules than bases in Japan since July 11. Restrictions were eased on outdoor physical fitness activities and visiting off-base essential services like doctors, veterinarians, banks, grocery stores and gas stations. While personnel and their families may opt to use off-base schools and child-care centers, off-base liberty and recreation still are prohibited.

Navy and Marine Corps medical personnel, after “vigorous contact tracing and conducting more than 4,500 COVID-19 tests in the past month,” have identified two clusters, III Marine Expeditionary Force said in a press release. Those clusters are at Camp Hansen and Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, both of which are on Okinawa. Most of these individuals have been in quarantine since July 18, some since July 12, III MEF said on a Facebook posting.

“The level of testing has decreased over the last few days as the large batch testing of entire groups and units on Camp Hansen and MCAS Futenma have [been] reduced,” Kunze said.

As of July 24, there were 189 cases of COVID-19 at U.S. military installations in Japan and outlying islands, according to U.S. Forces-Japan. They included 84 at Camp

Hansen, the worst-hit, 78 at MCAS Futenma, and two at Kadena Air Base, a U.S. Air Force facility, all on Okinawa. Two other Marine Corps installations on Okinawa, Camps Courtney and Kinser, each reported one person testing positive.

MCAS Iwakuni and Naval Air Facility Atsugi in Japan both reported three cases each and Fleet Activities, Yokosuka, reported nine cases. The remaining cases were at Army and Air Force bases in Japan.