

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.