Marine Corps, Navy Cease Administrative Actions to Dismiss COVID Vaccine Refusers



5/12/22: Covid Vaccine – Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Mark Forrey administers a COVID-19 vaccine to Navy Seaman Micah Dayoub aboard the USS Ronald Reagan, in Yokosuka, Japan, Sept. 9, 2022. The Ronald Reagan, Carrier Strike Group 5's flagship, is the Navy's only forward-deployed aircraft carrier. (Photo By: Navy Seaman Natasha Chevalier Losada)
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ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy and Marine Corps have halted administrative actions to discharge Sailors and Marines for refusing mandatory vaccination against the COVID-19 coronavirus variant.

In accordance with updated guidance from Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin III, "Commanders will immediately discontinue administrative separation processing of Marines solely for declining to receive the COVID-19 vaccine," Capt. Ryan Bruce, a Marine Corps spokesperson, told Seapower in a Jan. 20 email.

A Marine administrative message (MARADMIN) signed Jan. 18 by Lt. Gen. D.J. Furness, the Marine Corps deputy commandant for Plans, Policies and Operations directed commanders to, "immediately suspend any new or ongoing adverse administrative actions associated with declining the COVID-19 vaccine."

The MARADMIN also instructed commanders to cease any ongoing reviews of requests by current service members for a religious, administrative, or medial exemption, including pending appeals.

Furness's directive came a week after similar guidance for Navy commanders issued by Vice Adm. Richard J. Cheeseman, Jr., deputy chief of naval operations for Personnel, Manpower, and Training, N1.

Cheeseman told all commands to discontinue administrative separation processing of vaccine-refusing Sailors and, "suspend immediately any new adverse administrative actions associated with refusing the COVID-19 vaccine."

Thousands of Sailors and Marines have been separated from the sea services for vaccination refusal, following Austin's Aug. 24, 2021 memo making COVID vaccination mandatory for all active duty and Reserve members of the armed services and the National Guard.

Austin said the vaccination mandate was necessary to protect the force and maintain readiness. However, language in the fiscal 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), enacted in late December, required the defense secretary to rescind the mandate, which had sparked complaints from lawmakers and

lawsuits from service members.

The legislation stopped short of requiring the Pentagon to reinstate troops who were dismissed for refusing the shot. It also did not mention giving them back pay.

However, on Jan. 17, Pentagon Press Secretary Brigadier Gen. Pat Ryder told reporters, “Right now, we are not currently pursuing back-pay to service members who were dismissed for refusing to take the COVID vaccination.”

As of Dec. 20, 2022, the latest Defense Department COVID-19 statistics, almost 2 million service members have been fully vaccinated, including 389,177 in the Navy and 200,186 Marines.