

More Cases on Roosevelt as COVID-19 Spreads Across Navy, Marine Corps



Sailors prepare surgical equipment to be sterilized aboard the hospital ship USNS Mercy. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Luke Cunningham

ARLINGTON, Va. – COVID-19 cases are on the rise among U.S. Navy personnel, including five more Sailors diagnosed with the novel coronavirus aboard the deployed aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, according to acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly.

The news brings the number of Roosevelt crew members testing positive for COVID-19 to eight and raises the total number of infected active-duty uniformed Navy personnel to 104, Modly told a Pentagon press briefing March 26, adding that 23 Navy civilian employees, 16 family members and 19 civilian contractors also have the virus.

He acknowledged that those totals indicate the Navy has the highest number – about one third – of all coronavirus cases in the military. By contrast, the Marine Corps, which keeps a separate tally, has reported 31 cases of COVID-19 among active-duty personnel, including the first service member working in the Pentagon to test positive. Also, five civilian Marine Corps employees, five dependents and three contractors also have tested positive.



A sign put up to limit the spread of COVID-19 is displayed in the Marine Corps Exchange at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina on March 23. U.S. Marine Corps/Lance Cpl. Taylor Smith

"I think we are trending higher. Some data that I saw this morning showed that we are probably a third of all the active-duty people that have tested positive," said Modly, adding "I don't have a reason for that."

While the Navy is deployed around the world and has large concentrations of people in places like San Diego and Norfolk, Virginia, Modly said any estimated explanations were just speculation. "We have not done the forensics yet on where these individual Sailors contracted the disease and, until we know that, it would be irresponsible for me to say why we think this is happening," he said.

All eight infected Sailors evacuated from the Roosevelt to Guam had mild symptoms and were not hospitalized but they are quarantined, Modly said. In a change from earlier plans, he said 100% of the nearly 5,000 crew members on board the carrier would be tested for the coronavirus "to ensure we are able to contain whatever spread might have occurred on the ship." He stressed the ship is operationally capable and "can do its mission if required to do so."

The Roosevelt is making a previously-scheduled port visit to Guam, where testing the whole crew will be completed. All crew will be confined to the ship or the pier area while in port. In the meantime, the ship has 800 testing kits, with more on the way by air, and some limited ability to process the samples. Sailors who test positive will be transported to the U.S. Naval Hospital Guam for further evaluation and treatment

as necessary.

The infected Marine stationed at the Pentagon was last in the building on March 13 and tested positive on March 24 and is in isolation at home. His workplace has been cleaned by response crews. Both Marine Corps recruit depots have begun screening incoming recruits and at least two have tested positive for the virus, but no drill instructors have. Two other Marines stationed at Parris Island have tested positive, but they were already in quarantine when their tests came back, Modly said.

The Navy has accelerated preparations for the hospital ship USNS Comfort to sail to New York City to help relieve local hospitals' non-COVID-19 workload. Originally planned to depart from Norfolk, Virginia, on April 3, "in all likelihood she's getting underway this weekend," Modly said. "Hopefully she'll be in New York by the early part of next week," he added. The Navy's other hospital ship, USNS Mercy, has been deployed to perform similar duties treating non-coronavirus cases in Los Angeles.