



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on November 18, 2021

Navy: Unvaccinated Sailors Set for General Discharge, Face Other Administrative Actions

Thousands of U.S. Navy sailors who refuse to get inoculated for COVID-19 will be separated from the force and could lose some of their veterans' benefits.

According to [Navy guidelines](#) released Monday,

“In order to ensure a fully vaccinated force, it is U.S. Navy policy to separate all Navy service members who refuse the lawful order to receive the COVID-19 vaccination,” Vice Adm. John B. Nowell, Jr., the chief of naval personnel wrote, in the message. “The least favorable characterization of service for Navy service members refusing the vaccine, without extenuating circumstances, will be GENERAL (under honorable conditions).”



The update comes after the Navy [announced](#) last month it was setting up a special COVID Consolidated Disposition Authority (CCDA) to “ensure a fair and consistent process” handling separation determinations for those who refuse to comply with the vaccination mandate.

The updated policy details that a general discharge will result in the loss of eligibility for some veteran benefits such as the GI Bill, including the transfer of GI Bill benefits to dependents, at the discretion of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

The sailors whose medical and religious vaccine exemption requests are under review will not be processed for separation or be subject to administrative consequences for refusing the shot.

However, depending on operational readiness and mission requirements, commanders can temporarily reassign such sailors with the approval of the first flag officer in their chain of command.

If a sailor's exemption is denied, he or she will be required to start vaccinations within five days of receiving that disapproval if he or she doesn't wish to get booted. If the deadline is not met, the sailor will be processed for discharge. Decisions on whether to suspend or go ahead with separation after a five-day deadline will be made by the Navy's Consolidated Disposition Authority (CCDA), per the guidance.

Within 30 days after a sailor refuses the COVID job, commanders must issue adverse fitness reports and evaluations documenting service members' failure to comply with the mandate.

The consequences of such report would include:



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- Ineligibility for promotion or advancing, “meaning anyone already frocked to the next pay grade will see that privilege revoked immediately.” The servicemen will also be ineligible to re-enlist or extend their service.
- Spot promoted officers will be removed from their billets.
- For enlisted sailors, passing the deadline initially puts any pending advancements on hold.
- Navy service members refusing the vaccine will not be allowed to transfer on Permanent Change of Station moves.
- Loss of eligibility for bonuses and special or incentive pays.
- Removal of warfare qualifications, additional qualification designations, Navy Enlisted Classifications, or sub-specialties.
- Loss of eligibility for Tuition Assistance (TA) and the Department of Defense’s Skillbridge training program for transitioning service members.

The Navy’s deadline for active-duty sailors to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 is November 28, while Reserve service members have until December 28.

According to the data provided by the [Navy](#), “As of November 17, 96.7% of active-duty Sailors were fully immunized, and 99.7% received at least one dose of the jab. 85.5% of reserve Sailors are fully immunized and 88.6% of reserve Sailors have received at least one dose of the vaccine. 93.3% of the total force is fully immunized and 96.7% have received at least one dose of the vaccine.”

Those percentages translate into 3,500 active-duty sailors who have not begun the process of getting vaccinated. About 17,500 won’t be fully vaccinated by the deadline.

Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby [told](#) reporters Wednesday that Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin supports the Navy’s latest policy update.

A day earlier, Kirby said, “obviously” those who can’t take a vaccine could ask for an exemption on religious or medical grounds.

But getting an exemption looks like a hard task, since the Navy only granted six permanent medical exemptions while approving zero religious waiver requests, per the Navy site. In comparison, the Air Force has granted [1,866 airmen](#) and Space Force guardians exemptions from the COVID vaccination, the vast majority for medical reasons. Notably, as of November 13, over 16,000 U.S. service members in all military branches have submitted applications for a religious exemption, but none of them was granted, per [The Epoch Times](#).

In addition to that, the strict deadline is arguably legally shaky, since the military can only mandate vaccines that have received full licensure from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). That provision is explicitly specified in the “[Memorandum](#) for Mandatory Coronavirus 2019 Disease Vaccination” issued by the Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin on August 24.

As of today, only Pfizer’s Comirnaty vaccine has received such approval. The FDA provided that Comirnaty and a “regular” Pfizer-BioNTech jabs may be used “interchangeably,” but the regulators noted the products are “legally distinct,” as detailed in a [New American report](#). That means that Pfizer-BioNTech unnamed jabs can not be legally mandated for use in the military.

As for the COVID jabs that have only been granted an emergency use authorization (EUA), servicemen



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have a [right](#) to refuse them.

According to [Navy Times](#), more than 70 service members across all branches have died due to complications from COVID, with at least 15 of those from the Navy, per the Pentagon data updated on November 10. The Navy reports that all Navy COVID-19 deaths have been among unvaccinated sailors.

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