



SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
1000 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1000

NOV 03 2021

The Honorable James N. Inhofe  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Armed Services  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Inhofe,

I sincerely appreciate your concern for the readiness of our troops. And I know you agree with me that our Force must remain healthy and ready to defend the Nation. Vaccination against the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) helps us achieve that goal. And I believe the overwhelming majority of the Department of Defense (DoD) workforce understands that as well. This is a readiness issue – full stop.

I am proud to report that our efforts to date, and the steady increases in the overall percentages of DoD-affiliated personnel who are vaccinated, confirm that the Department is coming together to finish the job with urgency, professionalism, and compassion.

As you know, mandatory vaccinations are familiar for all our Service members and mission-critical inoculation is almost as old as the U.S. military itself. Department policy requires over a dozen vaccines, and such requirements have been in place in varying forms since 1914. The Food and Drug Administration authorized and approved COVID-19 vaccines have been studied extensively and found to be safe and effective.

In making our decision to require vaccination for Service members, we prudently considered the impacts of the highly transmissible Delta variant, the hospitalizations of our people, and the approximately 12,000 COVID-19 related cases and hundreds of deaths, among Service members, families, and our military community. COVID-19 takes our Service members out of the fight, temporarily or permanently, and jeopardizes our ability to meet mission requirements. If left unchecked, this virus can render an entire unit unfit for mission accomplishment.

It is my assessment – after consulting with senior leaders here – that the Department will incur nominal attrition due to individuals refusing COVID-19 vaccination. To date, over 97 percent of our active duty force has received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, and more than 87 percent are fully vaccinated. To date, there has not been an exceptional number of exemptions sought. These requests will be adjudicated individually, ensuring each Service member's request is appropriately and fairly addressed.

The Department's civilian and contractor workforces are also critical to the readiness of the Force. President Biden has issued two Executive Orders requiring COVID-19 vaccination for all Federal civilian employees and certain Government contractor personnel, to ensure their health and safety, as well as those with whom they interact. The Department has issued policies to implement these orders, while providing guidance concerning the circumstances when an individual is legally entitled to an exemption for religious or medical reasons. I likewise anticipate that the vast majority of our civilian personnel will choose COVID-19 vaccination. As you know, the Department neither discharges contractor personnel nor processes contractor personnel's exemption requests, as contractor personnel are employed by the party under contract with the Department, and all decisions concerning their employment are up to their employer.

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Again, I am encouraged by the COVID-19 vaccine acceptance rates to date, which confirms traditional military compliance with legal orders. And I firmly believe that the mandatory vaccination policy for COVID-19 protects our military readiness and the safety of our military families.

I have instructed the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to provide you as much detail as possible in a separate written response, and in a classified brief, in response to your questions on readiness.

COVID-19 vaccination will ensure that we remain the most lethal and ready force in the world.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert J. Hentz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "R".