

Marines Grapple with Maintaining Readiness Amid COVID-19 Restrictions



Marine provost marshals take precautions against COVID-19 at Marine Corps Air Ground Center in Twentynine Palms, California. U.S. Marine Corps

ARLINGTON, Va. – Restrictions imposed by the battle against the coronavirus are presenting the U.S. Marine Corps with an array of new challenges – from maintaining grooming standards to how, when and where America’s force in readiness can train safely in a pandemic.

In a joint Pentagon press briefing on March 26 with Marine Commandant

Gen. David Berger, acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly said the Marines have

scaled back training at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms

and the Mountain Warfare Training Center, both in California. They also have

canceled training with foreign partners and much of the Headquarters Marine

Corps staff have been ordered to work from home.

[See: More Cases on Roosevelt as COVID-19 Spreads Across Navy, Marine Corps](#)

Promotion boards can spread out over several rooms and shooters can spread out on the firing line of a pistol range, but “in a live-fire

exercise you can only do so much to moderate social distancing,” Berger said.

“The Marine Corps is unique,” the commandant explained. “We

are mandated by law to be the nation's most ready force." He has given local commanders leeway to operate as they see best depending on the local situation rather than issuing a blanket, Corps-wide list of restrictions. When it comes to training, Berger said, "commanders are taking measures that make sense but also making sure their units are trained and ready to go."

"This is a unique time. We're trying to find unique answers. It's not going to be the same as sitting in the bleachers at graduation. There's no way to replicate that."

Sgt. Major of the Marine Corps Troy Black

Basic training graduations have been closed to all outsiders, including family, to prevent spreading disease. "It's driving us to be pretty creative," Berger said. The ceremonies are now televised and digitally recorded for each new Marine.

"This is a unique time. We're trying to find unique answers," said Sgt. Major of the Marine Corps Troy Black, but he conceded "it's not going to be the same as sitting in the bleachers at graduation. There's no way to replicate that."

Although leaders have halted face-to-face meetings between recruiters and enlistment prospects, the Marines have not stopped training or bringing new recruits to boot camps in California and South Carolina. Both facilities have begun screening incoming recruits before they depart from processing stations and when they arrive at the recruit depot. Any showing

symptoms are isolated. At least two have tested positive for the virus, but no drill instructors have, Modly said.

“Everybody’s still getting their head shaved as long as the barbers come to work,” Berger said, “but there will come that time when it gets worse and worse and worse, where barbers won’t come to work. In that case we’ll have to make a decision: ‘Do Marines cut Marines’ hair?’ Commanders at both of our recruit depots have thought their way through it.”

Berger noted headquarters hasn’t said grooming standards are relaxed for a given period. “What we have said is commanders have the latitude to make adjustments based on what’s available at your location.”