

More Okinawa Marines, One in Australia Test Positive for COVID-19



Marine Lance Cpl. Aaron Santos conducts temperature checks on outbound traffic at Camp Courtney, Okinawa, Japan. In light of recent COVID-19 events there, Marines stationed on Okinawa have taken additional precautions by conducting temperature checks at the entrance of gates and essential services. U.S. MARINE CORPS

ARLINGTON, Va. – The number of personnel testing positive for COVID-19 at U.S. Marine Corps bases on Okinawa has grown to 136, according to the provincial governor of the Japanese island.

Gov. Denny Tamaki told reporters in Tokyo that another 36 cases have been reported at Camp Hansen, one of the first two facilities reporting novel coronavirus-positive clusters on Okinawa, the Associated Press reported July 16.

Like many Okinawans, Tamaki has been critical of the large U.S. military presence there, citing increased noise, crime, and aircraft accidents. He flew to Tokyo to complain to Japanese Defense Minister Taro Kono that he was not getting enough information about the outbreaks among Marines on Okinawa and asked Kono to urge the U.S. military to be more cooperative.

In keeping with U.S. Defense Department policy, the Marine Corps itself will not disclose how many Marines and Sailors on Okinawa are infected, but they have been sharing that information with health officials in the Okinawa Provincial Government. A Marine official has said the numbers Tamaki has been giving to the news media have been accurate.

In addition to outbreaks at Camp Hansen and Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, which the Marine Corps has acknowledged, Tamaki said others included Camp Kinser and Camp McTureous. The Kinser and McTureous cases did not constitute additional outbreaks, the Marines maintained.



A member of Marine Rotational Force Darwin, in Australia's Northern Territory, takes a COVID-19 test. One Marine there also has tested positive for the novel coronavirus and is in isolation at a hospital there. MARINE ROTATIONAL FORCE DARWIN via Facebook

The Camp McTureous case "was directly related to someone returning from the U.S. That person didn't test positive until showing symptoms and being tested shortly after returning home. All residents of that home were isolated upon return and that was an isolated case," Maj. Kenneth Kunze, a spokesperson for Marine Corps Installations Pacific (MCIPAC), said in a statement. Likewise, the other case "involved a resident of Camp Kinser, but that case was related to the Camp Hansen cluster and was not a new or different outbreak," Kunze said.

On July 11, MCIPAC ordered an enhanced lockdown at all Marine installations across Okinawa. That included closing all nonessential facilities and limiting mess halls, exchanges, commissaries, base restaurants and food courts to take-out service. The new restrictions apply to all uniformed and civilian Marine personnel based on Okinawa.

Meanwhile, a member of the Marine Rotational Force Darwin, in Australia's Northern Territory, has tested positive for COVID-19 as well.

The infected Marine arrived with the most recent wave of Marines on July 8. All the others received initial negative results, following a strict 14-day quarantine in barracks upon arrival in Australia, according to an announcement posted July 10 on the Rotational Force's Facebook page.

The Marine is currently under strict isolation at Royal Darwin Hospital and the Northern Territory government is providing support. All those who may have interacted with the infected Marine have been identified and placed under quarantine for a minimum of 14-days and will receive additional testing.

Medical specialists will continue to monitor the health of all Marines. Should the condition of any become serious, they will be to Royal Darwin Hospital for follow on observation, testing and treatment, the announcement said.

The Marine Corps has been deploying Marines to northern Australia for an annual six-month rotation since 2012, but this year's deployment was postponed in March over concerns about possible COVID-19 exposure. The decision to resume in May came after Australia granted an exemption to its travel restrictions.