

Navy, Marine Corps Dismissals for Refusing COVID-19 Vaccinations Now Total More Than 3,000



Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Darion Wilson, left, administers a COVID-19 test in the vehicle stowage area aboard amphibious assault carrier USS Tripoli (LHA 7), May 19. Tripoli is underway conducting routine operations in U.S. 7th Fleet. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Maci Sternod*
ARLINGTON, Va. – More than 2,000 U.S. Marines and 1,000 Sailors have been separated from the sea services for refusing vaccination against the COVID-19 coronavirus since the Defense Department ordered mandatory vaccinations late last year.

In its weekly COVID-19 Update on June 8, the U.S. Navy reported 1,099 separations for COVID-19 vaccine refusal. They included 980 active component Sailors, 98 Reservists, and 22 entry-level separations of new recruits during their initial training periods.

The Marine Corps, which shifted from a weekly to a monthly COVID update in mid-April, announced June 2 that 2,715 Marines have been separated from the Corps for vaccine refusal. There was no breakdown showing how many of those dismissed were active duty, reservists or recruits.

The fiscal 2022 National Defense Authorization Act enacted in December 2021 requires discharges of military personnel for vaccine refusal must be either honorable or general under honorable conditions.

According to the weekly Defense Department COVID update, 6,417 Marines and 6,806 Sailors are at least partially vaccinated

and 194,639 Marines and 383,564 Sailors are fully vaccinated as of June 8. Both the Navy and Marine Corps, as well as the Pentagon, consider COVID-19 a readiness issue requiring full vaccination for all military personnel.

The Navy said 3,906 active duty Sailors and 3,279 personnel in the Ready Reserve remain unvaccinated as of June 1. The Marine Corps report doesn't give specific figures, only stating fully and partially vaccinated percentages that indicate just 2% of the active force and 7% of reservists remain unvaccinated.

The Navy has granted 227 medical exemptions for COVID vaccination to active duty Sailors, all but 14 of them temporary. Only one of the 79 medical exemptions granted reservists was permanent. The Marine Corps said 742 requests for medical or administrative exemption from vaccination have been approved. As of June 1, the Marine Corps has received 3,719 requests for vaccination exemption on religious grounds. Only seven have been approved.

The Navy has gotten religious accommodation requests from 3,351 active duty Sailors and 864 in the Ready Reserve. Only 13 of the reservists' requests have been conditionally approved and just one active duty Sailor's was approved.

The Navy has been unable to discharge vaccine refusers since a federal judge in Texas granted a preliminary injunction in March barring the Navy from acting against the thousands of Sailors seeking exemption from vaccination on religious grounds. The U.S. Supreme Court later ruled the Navy could consider a Sailor's vaccination status in making deployment and other operational decisions while a lawsuit on the Pentagon's mandatory vaccination policy moves through the courts.