



MAY 20 2021

MEMORANDUM FOR SENIOR PENTAGON LEADERSHIP
COMMANDERS OF THE COMBATANT COMMANDS
DEFENSE AGENCY AND DOD FIELD ACTIVITY DIRECTORS

SUBJECT: Methods to Enable and Encourage Vaccination Against Coronavirus Disease 2019

As the Secretary of Defense has repeatedly stated, the greatest proximate challenge to our Nation's security is coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The Secretary directed the Department to act "boldly and quickly" to defend the force against the disease, and we thank you for taking action to do so. But the threat of COVID-19 to our Nation and our allies and partners has not yet abated. As of early May 2021, the Department as a whole has suffered more than 285,000 cases, and we have lost nearly 350 of our teammates. We must continue to do all we can to operate safely and effectively in a COVID-19 environment for the foreseeable future.

Vaccination is critical to defending against COVID-19. Used together with testing, hand washing, and other mitigation measures, vaccination can prevent people from getting COVID-19 and keep them from getting seriously ill if they do get the disease. With greater access to vaccinations and a more readily available supply of vaccine, we are now moving into a new phase of our efforts. This memorandum reaffirms our support for initiatives to increase vaccination acceptance among all Service members. To encourage and promote vaccination, we ask the Secretaries of the Military Departments to ensure Commanders and leaders at all levels are aware of the following information.

Accessibility. On April 19, 2021, the Department made it possible for all eligible beneficiaries to schedule a COVID-19 vaccine appointment. Leaders should make vaccination as easy and convenient as possible for Service members and, where appropriate, for family members. Leaders should consider utilizing techniques such as stand-downs, vaccination days, organization days, and incorporating vaccination opportunities into unit training events.

Education. The three current U.S. Food and Drug Administration-authorized COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective and reduce the risk of hospitalization and death. Secretary of Defense Memorandum, "Message to the Force", March 4, 2021, noted that vaccination efforts require "an aggressive effort to inform and educate people about the safety and efficacy of available vaccines." Thank you for the countless hours that leaders have already spent educating our personnel. Please continue these efforts at every opportunity. One initiative that has significantly increased vaccination rates is ensuring that personnel who are uncertain about whether to be vaccinated are able to speak with medical professionals about the benefits of vaccination and the risks of getting COVID-19. These opportunities enable individuals to ask questions and build confidence before making the choice to get vaccinated. Another educational resource that provides invaluable information to leaders and Service members is the Military Health System's COVID-19 toolkit, available at www.Health.mil/CommanderToolkit. Finally,

we encourage incorporating family members into these educational and information-sharing activities, which can provide reinforcing support for vaccination.

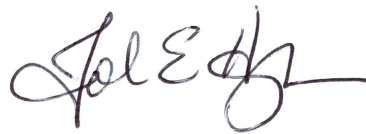
Personnel Policy. Existing policies and procedures for managing our personnel should be utilized to the greatest extent possible, as appropriate and authorized, to encourage vaccination. Our personnel must feel supported in choosing to get vaccinated. Leaders are encouraged to consider routine tools available to them for personnel management, including, for example, utilization of special liberty (pass) options, use of non-chargeable convalescent leave (often referred to as “sick-in-quarters” or “in quarters”) for post-vaccination recovery, and use of medical or other vaccination locations as a member’s place of duty to receive vaccination. Leaders should familiarize themselves with these and other available tools, while ensuring these tools are used in accordance with existing Military Department/Service and Component guidance.

Engagement at the Lowest Level. As you know, receiving a COVID-19 vaccine remains voluntary. It is up to the individual Service member to decide whether or not to get vaccinated. When we engage Service members at an individual level using trusted messengers—particularly peers, medical personnel, and first-line leaders—who acknowledge concerns in a nonjudgmental way and address questions, we know that we can increase vaccination rates, one individual at a time. These conversations are not easy, they may not be short, and they may require multiple touchpoints, but they are critically important. We know from our experience within the Department that use of this approach works, and encourage its widespread adoption.

The Department will continue to support vaccination of Service members and their families. Vaccination enhances operational readiness and protects the force. The Department is committed to supporting our Nation’s fight against COVID-19. Widespread vaccination within DoD is one critical part of that effort. We thank all our Service members and other DoD personnel who have chosen to get vaccinated and continue to encourage their fellow Service members, families, friends, peers, and community to do so as well.



Kathleen H. Hicks
Deputy Secretary of Defense



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