

# COVID-19 FAQs for Commissioned Officers

Updated: May 4, 2020

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**Q. What is the current deployment process in the IHS, in light of RADM Trent-Adams' message dated 03/25/2020?**

A. The normal IHS deployment approval process remains in effect, until further notice. The Division of Commissioned Personnel Support (DCPS) forwards each request for deployment for concurrence by the officer's CEO/Tribal/Urban Organization and Area/Office Director. Upon receipt of the Area/Office Director's decision, a member of DCPS will notify the Readiness and Deployment Branch (RDB) and the officer of either approval or disapproval.

**Q. If I am designated Mission Critical, can I be deployed? (Updated)**

A. Yes, potentially. Personnel Operations Memorandum [\(POM\) 821.76 "Deployment Procedures"](#) outlines a process through which OPDIVs may designate individual officers as Mission Critical (MC), which will *generally* temporarily preclude the officer from deployment under specific types of conditions. However, if there is a declared urgent or emergency public health care need, in accordance with the POM, the CCHQ Director will not act on a MC submission until the declared public health care emergency ends.

**Q. I have a significant role with COVID-19 activities in an IHS/Tribal/Urban Program. Can I be deployed?**

A. Many officers in the IHS are heavily involved in COVID-19 response activities and may be temporarily deemed Mission Critical (MC). Officers on the MC list can still be deployed by authority of the Secretary and Assistant Secretary for Health to meet the needs of the mission, per [CCI 241.02 "Deployment of Corps Officers"](#). Officers should continue to be willing and prepared to deploy, if called upon to serve.

**Q. If I am notified by RDB that I am being deployed, what steps should I take (i.e. have received travel itinerary)?**

A. Upon receipt of deployment notification, deploying officers should:

1. Notify your supervisory chain and [DCPS Regional Liaison Office](#) of the details, including travel dates and location.
2. Update your supervisory chain and DCPS Regional Liaison Office of any significant changes from the itinerary, including plans to demobilize early or extend the deployment.

3. Upon demobilization, notify your supervisory chain and Regional Liaison Office for their awareness and discuss post-deployment instructions and return-to-work expectations with your supervisory chain.

IHS Leadership, including Area and HQ Office Directors, and most federal, Tribal, and Urban Indian organizations support the deployment of Corps officers, whenever possible. Commissioned Corps Leadership works in close coordination with the IHS Leadership to ensure that patient care for American Indians and Alaska Natives is not impacted.

**Q. What should I do if am directed to deploy by RDB, without having agency concurrence?**

- A. Immediately notify your supervisor and your [DCPS Regional Liaison Office](#) team with copy to CAPT Angela Mtungwa, DCPS Director, providing the travel itinerary and a contact phone number through which to reach you quickly. The deployment notification may be inadvertent or it could indicate that you are being deployed without agency concurrence, per [CCI 241.02](#). DCPS will immediately contact RDB to verify, and provide you additional direction. If travel for the deployment is imminent and/or until hearing from DCPS, continue to prepare for deployment and comply with the travel orders.

**Q. If I believe I have been infected with COVID-19 or have had close contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, what do I do?**

- A. Officers should seek medical advice and follow current CDC guidance found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-risk-assesment-hcp.html>. If you are unsure who to contact for medical advice, call the Military Health System Nurse Advice line (MHS NAL) at 1-800-874-2273, choose Option 1, or online at <https://mhsnurseadvice.com>.

**Q. What are the reporting requirements if I test positive for COVID-19? (Updated)**

- A. If you test positive for COVID-19, pursuant to Commissioned Corps Directive [\(CCD\) 111.03, "Conditions of Service,"](#) all officers are required to promptly inform Medical Affairs of any significant new medical/mental health diagnoses which could potentially affect their long term health status, including a positive COVID-19 diagnosis. You are required to report a positive COVID-19 test result to Medical Affairs, through Corps Care at [CorpsCare@hhs.gov](mailto:CorpsCare@hhs.gov) or 240-276-9616. You should also send related medical records into your permanent digital medical folder by uploading them through the medical section of eDOC-U using the document name, "Medical Record."

Officers should also report their condition to their supervisor in a manner consistent with their duty station's expectations as well as request sick leave in accordance with [CCI 363.01 "Sick Leave"](#), documenting sick leave requests in [eCORPS](#).

If you test positive for COVID-19 while you are deployed, report it immediately to your deployment Supervisor and they will notify the proper authorities.

**Q. If I am directed to self-isolate or quarantine post-deployment, should I request administrative leave?**

- A. No, unless all other options are exhausted. After post-deployment respite leave (if applicable), officers who are required to self-isolate or quarantine should telework to the

extent possible. Only if remote duty or telework is not possible should administrative leave be used.

### **Post-Deployment Respite Absence**

Per [POM 15-002 “Post-Deployment Respite Absence”](#), officers returning from a public health emergency or other national crisis deployment of at least 14 days that took them outside of their commuting area (50 mile radius), are allowed to utilize Post-Deployment Respite Absence (PDRA) at a rate dependent on the length of deployment. This type of leave must be requested by the officer, approved by the supervisor, and start within 48 hours of return.

### **Telework**

In accordance with the [CDC guidelines](#) and/or out of an abundance of caution at the discretion of an officer’s supervisory chain or a Tribe, returning officers may be approved for telework, if eligible. Commissioned Corps Instruction [CC313.01 “Telework”](#) and [IHS telework policies](#) should guide the use of telework for officers.

If the officer’s position of record does not have duties that are amenable to telework, the officer may be assigned duties from other positions, COVID-19 response duties, and/or other responsibilities. It will be difficult to justify a lack of duties for a Corps officer during this growing crisis, which is requiring a coordinated, all-hands-on-deck approach at all levels.

[The IHS Commissioned Corps telework form](#) is available under the [Officer Resources](#) section of the DCPS website. If you have a current IHS telework form that has been used to capture the telework, it does not need to be redone at this time; please provide a copy of it to the officer’s Regional DCPS Liaison for our records. The form should be updated annually.

### **Administrative Leave**

[CC361.01 “Leave of Absence; General”](#) Section 6-5 (a) permits officers who have been deployed on a COVID-19 mission and are required or encouraged to quarantine or self-isolate as a result, to be granted administrative leave that exceeds the 5-day per calendar year maximum, in order to ensure that appropriate officer monitoring occurs following deployment.

#### **Q. If I have childcare or eldercare responsibilities and/or need flexibility in scheduling, what are my options? (New)**

A. Speak with your supervisor about an alternative work schedule or telework or a combination of the two, or request annual leave. The tone and content of your request should demonstrate the desire to serve the mission in a way that also allows you to take care of your responsibilities at home, so you can devote your full attention to work while on duty, without anxiety or distraction. If you or your supervisor would like assistance exploring potential solutions, please contact your [Regional DCPS Liaison](#).

#### **Q. If I am not deployed because the agency did not give concurrence, will it result in adverse consequences, since officers are expected to be ready and available to deploy?**

A. No. If an officer indicates availability, but is not given agency concurrence for deployment, the officer is not held responsible, and is not subject to disciplinary action as a result of not deploying. Additionally, officers who do not deploy are not penalized in the promotion process.

**Q. Will the COVID-19 deployment missions delay or cancel my retirement or separation? Can I be recalled from terminal leave?**

A. Retirements or separations are not being cancelled at this time, although that could change in the future. You could be recalled from terminal leave or it could be cancelled. Terminal leave would be reviewed and evaluated on a case-by-case basis as determined by the program chain of command/supervisor.

**Q. Will the COVID-19 deployment missions delay or cancel my transfer?**

A. Transfers are not being cancelled or delayed at this time, intra agency (within IHS) or for transfers or calls to active duty into IHS. If you are transferring to another agency, please check with your gaining agency to see if your assignment has been delayed or cancelled.

**Q. What if I have a medical condition that may prevent me from safely or effectively deploying?**

A. Officers who have health conditions that they believe make it unsafe or impair their ability to effectively deploy, can apply for a waiver from Medical Affairs. Medical waivers differ in duration as well as type. Please consult the [Medical Affairs waiver program website](#) for details, including the link to the [Medical Waiver Request form](#) that must be completed and uploaded via eDOC-U in the [Officer Secure Area](#).

**Q. If I am on extended sick leave or have a waiver, will I be designated mission critical?**

A. No. Mission critical, as outlined in [POM 821.76](#), applies only to an officer's position or role in the agency. An officer's medical status should be addressed with Medical Affairs through a medical waiver request, per [CCI 221.02, "Medical Readiness"](#), Section 6-6. Medical or other types of waivers may temporarily preclude deployment of an officer, but does not designate them as mission critical.

**Q. Should I wear a face mask while in uniform? (New)**

A. Commissioned Corps Headquarters (CCHQ) released guidance regarding the wear of face masks in public while in uniform. To summarize:

- Officers are mandated to wear a cloth face mask while in uniform, in public, whenever 6 feet of social distancing cannot be maintained.
- Face masks can be manufactured or handmade and must be a single solid color (blue, black, gray, or white), with no designs, pins, printed wording, or logos.
- Based on the exclusions, even the PHS logo should not be visible on the mask.

**Q. What if I am unable to get a haircut because barber shops and salons are closed in my community? (New)**

A. Because barber shops and salons are currently closed in many municipalities, CCHQ has relaxed the grooming standards, effective until 30 days after the end of the Public Health Emergency or sooner, as ordered by the Surgeon General. The relaxed standards may allow for longer hair length and additional bulk on the sides, top, and back of the head, provided there is no interference with the proper wear of covers, head gear, or PPE.

However, provisions regarding sideburns, hair styles, and shaving requirements remain in

effect per [CCI 412.01](#), “Uniforms and Appearance.”

**Q. What should I do if I am unable to renew my professional license before expiration? (New)**

A. Many states and the District of Columbia have suspended license renewal services due to COVID-19. Officers who are unable to renew their license before expiration due to suspension of renewal services, may upload documentation of a waiver or extension via eDOC-U, in lieu of the license. The date the extension is set to end can be used as the expiration date for now. Officers may obtain information about license extensions from their issuing state agency’s website.

**Q. What if I need to update my Common Access Card (CAC)? (New)**

A. At this time, CAC transactions shall be limited to initial issuances or reissuance of a CAC expiring within 30 days. CACs are currently not being reissued for printed information changes (e.g., promotions, name changes). To locate the nearest DEERS/Rapids site, please visit the [Rapids Site Locator](#).

**Q. Will I be authorized to carry over more than 60 days of Annual Leave at the end of the fiscal year? (New)**

A. The Department of Defense has authorized the extended carryover of annual leave to 120 days per year until September 30, 2023. Leave for the DoD and all other uniformed services, except the PHS Commissioned Corps, is covered by Title 10, Chapter 40 of the U.S. Code. For the PHS Commissioned Corps, the leave authority resides in 42 U.S.C. §210-1, which restricts leave carryover in excess of 60 days per year. CCHQ is working to resolve the lack of alignment of leave authorities with the other uniformed services.

**Q. Where can I find more information from the Commissioned Corps concerning COVID-19?**

A. Information may be found through the following links:

- [CCHQ Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Mission-Deployments Readiness Updates](#): Provides officers relevant policy information related to deployments, readiness, and uniforms.
- Electronic Corps Mass Communication System (eCMCS): The Commissioned Corps secure messaging platform that is accessed through the [Officer Secure Area](#). Corps leadership and programs (such as the Financial Services Branch) utilize this system to send and receive secure messages from officers. Please ensure your profile is up to date in the [Officer Secure Area](#) and regularly access these messages for the most up to date information from CCHQ.
- [USPHS Learning Management System](#): Location of required deployment trainings, such as the COVID-19 Management Training Modules. From the home page, navigate to “Training” and select “Deployment Training” under the course category drop down menu.

**Q. What other COVID-19 resources are available to officers?**

A. Below are several resources:

- [ASPR COVID-19 Resources](#): As part of ASPR’s Healthcare Emergency Preparedness Gateway “TRACIE”, you will find numerous healthcare planning resources, government COVID-19 websites, technical assistance responses, infectious disease resources, as well as a variety of preparedness/response topics.
- [Corps Care](#): A support program for officers to increase their access to resources for physical, behavioral, and spiritual health needs. Officers can reach the Corps Care team 24/7 at [CorpsCare@hhs.gov](mailto:CorpsCare@hhs.gov).
- [Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#): Links to resources, information, assessment tools, benefits and services, including 24/7 phone based crisis line and counseling support available at 1-800-222-0364, as well as referrals to providers outside of the EAP program.
- [HHS COVID-19 Resources for HHS Employees](#) (requires your PIV card to access): Contains a broad range of announcements, frequently asked questions, links to government COVID-19 websites, the employee assistance program, telework resources and additional guidance on related topics.
- [IHS Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Page](#): Information about the number of cases by IHS Area, [Frequently Asked Questions about the Federal Response in Indian Country](#): Information about testing, access to personal protective equipment, funding, emergency planning, and service delivery during a pandemic, [News](#): Messages from IHS about the response to COVID-19, [Resources](#): for both clinicians and tribal leaders, and [Contacts](#): List of Area emergency management points of contact.
- [SAMHSA COVID-19 Training and technical assistance resources](#): Offers resources/webinar links for behavioral and substance use disorder topics and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- [Tricare and COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions](#) and [Email Listserv](#):
  - Learn about testing, health plan and pharmacy coverage, quarantine and more at the Coronavirus Frequently Asked Questions page.
  - To stay informed about Tricare and COVID-19, sign up for email updates.
  - [Tricare Pharmacy Program](#): Mail order delivery of 90 day supply of many prescription medications right to your home. Visit the informational page to learn more and get signed up.
  - [Nurse Advice Line – 1-800-TRICARE \(1-800-874-2273\)](#) nurses are available 24/7 to:
    - Answer your health care questions
    - Assess symptoms and give recommendations for appropriate level of care
    - Provide instructions to treat minor issues at home
    - Help locate an appropriate care facility
    - Help you schedule an appointment within 24 hours
  - [Emergency and Urgent Care Options](#)
  - [Telemedicine Services](#)

**Q. Where can I find contact information for our Agency or Regional Liaison Office?**

- A. Contact information for Division of Commissioned Personnel Support (DCPS) leadership and regional liaison office contacts may be found on the [DCPS website](#).