

# U.S. military members must get COVID vaccine by mid-September

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(HealthDay)—All members of the U.S. military must get a COVID-19

vaccine by mid-September, the Pentagon announced Monday.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin noted that the deadline could be moved up if the [vaccine](#) receives final approval sooner from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration or if infection rates continue to rise.

"I will seek the president's approval to make the vaccines mandatory no later than mid-September, or immediately upon" full FDA approval, "whichever comes first," Austin said in his [memo](#), which was released on Twitter.

The Pentagon plan gives the FDA time to give final approval to the Pfizer vaccine, which is expected to come early next month. Without that formal approval, Austin needs a waiver from Biden to make the shots mandatory, but Biden has made it clear that he supports the move.

In a [statement](#) released on Monday, Biden said he strongly supports Austin's plan to add the COVID vaccine "to the list of required vaccinations for our service members not later than mid-September."

"Being vaccinated will enable our service members to stay healthy, to better protect their families, and to ensure that our force is ready to operate anywhere in the world," Biden added.

Austin's decision mirrors moves made recently by governments and companies around the country, as the highly contagious Delta variant drives new U.S. cases, hospitalizations and deaths to heights not seen since last winter, the *Associated Press* reported. In the military, where service members live and work closely together in barracks and on ships, concerns about rapid spread of the virus are especially high because any large outbreak in the military could lessen America's ability to defend itself in a security crisis.

Austin stressed that if infection rates rise and threaten military readiness, "I will not hesitate to act sooner or recommend a different course to the President if I feel the need to do so. To defend this Nation, we need a healthy and ready force."

The military services will have the next few weeks to prepare, determine how many vaccines they need, and how this mandate will be implemented, the *AP* reported.

The decision will add the COVID-19 vaccine to a list of other shots that service members are already required to get. Depending on their location, service members can get as many as 17 different vaccines, the *AP* said.

Austin's memo also said that in the meantime, the Pentagon will comply with Biden's order for additional restrictions on unvaccinated federal personnel, including masks, social distancing and travel limits.

According to the Pentagon, more than 1 million troops are fully vaccinated and another 237,000 have received one shot, the *AP* reported. But the different military branches vary widely in their vaccination rates.

The Navy said that more than 74% of all active duty and reserve sailors have been vaccinated with at least one shot. The Air Force reports that more than 65% of its active duty and 60% of reserve forces are at least partially vaccinated, and the number for the Army appears closer to 50%, the *AP* reported.

Service members can seek an exemption from any vaccine—either temporary or permanent—for a variety of reasons including health issues or religious beliefs. Regulations say, for example, that anyone who had a severe adverse reaction to the vaccine can be exempt, and those who are pregnant or have other conditions can postpone a shot, the *AP* reported.

## **Fauci Hopes for Full Approval of Pfizer Vaccine by Month's End**

Dr. Anthony Fauci said Sunday he is hopeful that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration will give full approval to the Pfizer coronavirus vaccine by the end of August, and he predicted that a wave of vaccine mandates will soon follow.

At the moment, the agency has only granted emergency use of the Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines. Pfizer first applied for full approval in May.

While not mandating vaccines beyond the federal workforce, the Biden administration is urging state and [local governments](#) as well as businesses to consider the move. Fauci said on NBC's "Meet the Press" Sunday that "mandates at the local level need to be done" to help curb the spread of the highly contagious Delta variant, the *Associated Press* reported.

"I hope—I don't predict—I hope that it will be within the next few weeks. I hope it's within the month of August," Fauci said of FDA approval of the vaccine. "If that's the case, you're going to see the empowerment of local enterprises, giving mandates that could be colleges, universities, places of business, a whole variety and I strongly support that. The time has come. ... We've got to go the extra step to get people vaccinated."

Biden recently approved rules requiring federal workers to provide proof of vaccination or face regular testing, mask mandates and travel restrictions. Biden is also awaiting a recommendation from Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on potentially requiring U.S. troops to get vaccinated, the *AP* reported.

At the same time, numerous high-profile companies have told employees that coronavirus vaccination requirements are being planned, and some localities have issued or are considering vaccine requirements to dine indoors, the *AP* reported.

United Airlines said its employees will need to be fully vaccinated by Oct. 25 or five weeks after the FDA grants full approval to one of the vaccines—whichever date comes first.

Meanwhile, Disney and Walmart have announced vaccine mandates for white-collar workers, and Microsoft, Google and Facebook said they will require proof of vaccination for employees and visitors to their U.S. offices, the *AP* reported. Tyson Foods has also announced it will require all U.S. employees to get vaccinated by November.

But last week, the U.S. Supreme Court was asked to block a vaccine mandate plan by Indiana University after a federal appeals court ruled in the university's favor, the *AP* reported. It's the first time the high court has been asked to weigh in on a vaccine mandate.

Randi Weingarten, president of American Federation of Teachers union, told NBC's "Meet the Press" on Sunday that she supports a vaccine mandate for educators.

"As a matter of personal conscience, I think that we need to be working with our employers—not opposing them on vaccine mandates," said Weingarten, who estimated that roughly 90% of the union's members are already vaccinated.

Dr. Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health, on Sunday was an unabashed fan of vaccine mandates, telling ABC's "This Week" that, "I celebrate when I see businesses deciding that they're going to mandate that for their employees. Yes, I think we ought to use

every public health tool we can when people are dying."

**More information:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [COVID-19](#).

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