

# Nearly a third of service members given COVID-19 vaccine

[Ellen Mitchell](#) 04/21/21 06:42 PM EDT

A little more than 740,000 service members, or roughly one-third of the total force, are partially or fully vaccinated against COVID-19, new Defense Department (DOD) numbers revealed Wednesday.

The numbers, [posted to the Pentagon's website](#), show 459,921 troops are fully vaccinated while another 280,667 have received a first shot. Combined, the numbers represent 28 percent of the 2,603,081 doses the U.S. military has administered.

Most of the service members vaccinated thus far were in phase one of the rollout and include medical staff, first responders, those deploying overseas and individuals with pre-existing conditions.

As of Monday, all DOD personnel and their beneficiaries [can now make an appointment](#) to receive a vaccine, in line with the rest of the U.S. population.

"We are encouraging everyone to get vaccinated, because these vaccines are very effective and safe, and are a critical part of us getting back to normal," acting Defense Secretary for Health Affairs Terry Adirim told reporters at the Pentagon.

Breaking down the numbers further, the Army, the largest service, has given the most shots at nearly 270,000. That's followed by the Navy with 215,650, the Air Force with 176,708 and the Marine Corps, the smallest service, with 78,300.

But when comparing the numbers to the total force of each service, the Navy has the highest rate at roughly 53 percent, followed by the Air Force and Marine Corps, both at 35 percent, and the Army at 25 percent.

Army Lt. Gen. Ronald Place, who spoke alongside Adirim, said that vaccination rates have been “significantly more overseas” than stateside, or about 10 to 15 percent higher.

The only geographical combatant command that doesn’t have more than 50 percent of service members, their dependents, DOD civilians and contractors is European Command, he added, but did not “want to speculate what made the reasons why” this was the case.

Adirim noted that prior to this week, the Pentagon was not yet offering a vaccine to service members considered to be young and healthy, “so that may have some impact” on lower percentage rates in some services or combatant commands.

She said officials have heard anecdotally and through surveys that younger people may feel that they’re not as vulnerable to COVID-19 and that the risk of vaccine side effects is higher than contracting the virus — “which, of course, we know not to be true.”

Others are waiting to allow shots to go to individuals that may be more at risk to the illness, Adirim added.

The Pentagon does not track how many military members reject the vaccine, making it difficult to pinpoint why troops, sailors and airmen choose to forego the shot.

Since last year, more than 185,000 service members have tested positive for coronavirus and 24 have died.