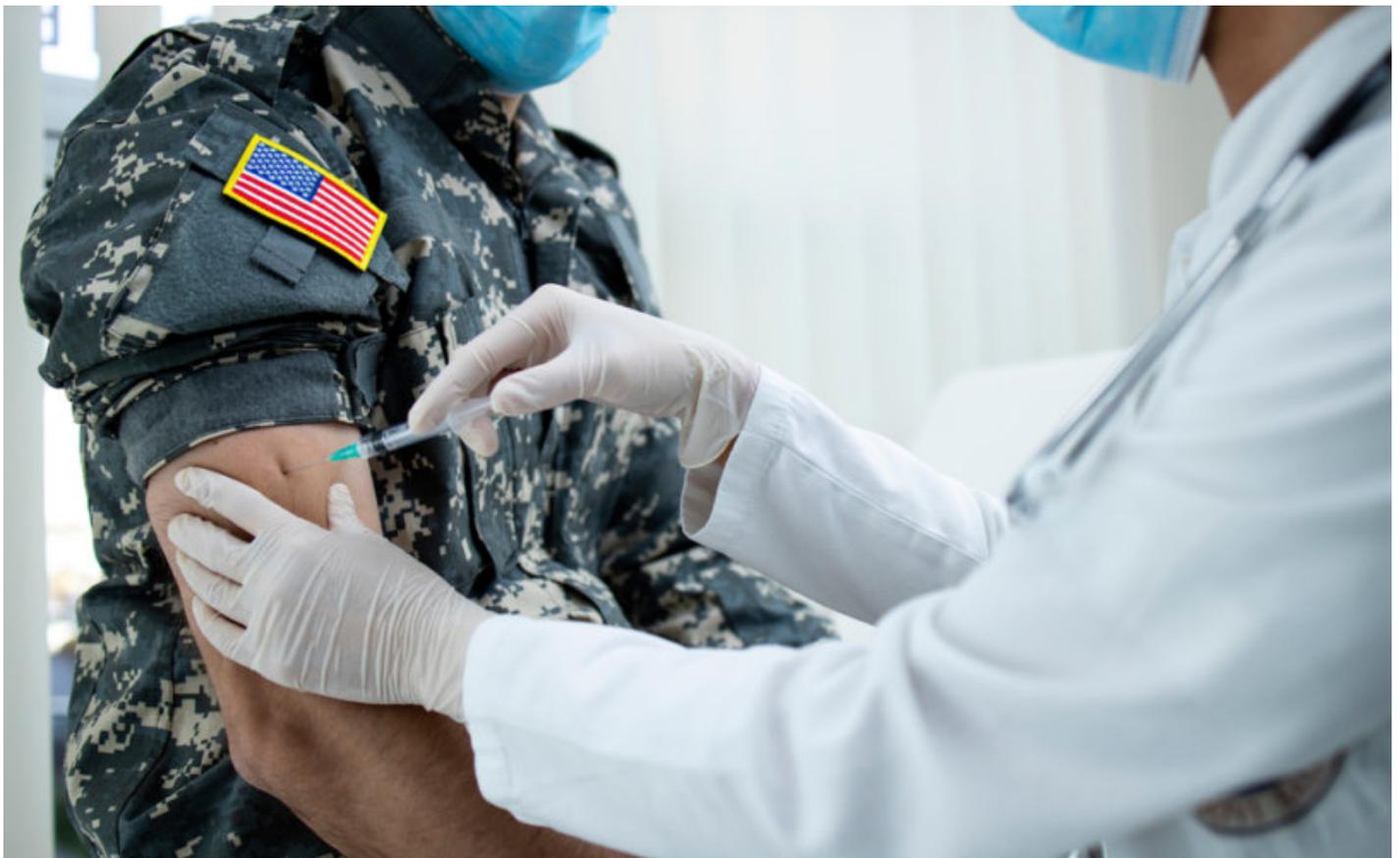


**NEWS**

# US military hasn't approved any of 12,000 religious exemption requests for COVID vax: report

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'If in their heart and their mind, they say this is God's will for my life, and if the answer is no, it's going to shatter that faith because there's no balance,' one Army chaplain said.



U.S. serviceman receiving COVID-19 injection.

Aleksandar Malivuk/Shutterstock

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## Calvin Freiburger

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WASHINGTON, D.C. ([LifeSiteNews](#)) – The U.S. Armed Forces has yet to approve a single religious exemption to mandatory COVID-19 vaccination despite facing 12,000 requests.

The news comes from a December 19 [report](#) by the Associated Press, which interviews military personnel at various stages of the process.

In August, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin [directed](#) the secretaries of all military branches to “immediately begin full [COVID] vaccination of all members of the Armed Forces” and “impose ambitious timelines for implementation.” The [deadlines](#) are November 2 for the Air Force, November 28 for the Navy and Marine Corps, December 15 for the Army, December 28 for the Navy and Marine Corps Reserves, and December 2 for the Air Force Guard and Reserves. Army Guard and Reserves have until June 2022.

Most service members have complied, but more than 30,000 troops remain unvaccinated, with over 20,000 seeking religious exemptions or medical exemptions, or simply refusing to comply. Several thousand have secured exemptions for non-religious reasons.

“We did not expect the surge of requests,” said Air Force Col. Paul Sutter, chief chaplain for religious affairs for the Air Force’s new Space Force branch, instituted under the Trump administration. Last week, the Air Force [began discharging](#) members for noncompliance.

One anonymous female reservist and mother of three explained that her chaplain was “very straightforward” about the process and the dim prospects for her request being approved, but holds firm in her belief that “God has a plan for my life.”

“I will have to forfeit G.I. Bill tuition benefits she would gain from an additional year of service, she continued, but she is willing to do so if it comes to that. “I have no doubt God will provide for me.”

The process, which covers a variety of religious requests for exemptions from certain military practices predating COVID-19, requires meeting with military chaplains to verify that the applicant is acting out of a “sincerely held belief,” as well as meeting with commanders and medical personnel. The final decision also considers “whether the person’s vaccine exemption will pose a risk to mission accomplishment, unit cohesion, the health and safety of the force, and military readiness,” the AP reported.

“We’re just looking for their articulation of their deeply held beliefs,” Sutter added. “You’re looking for a consistency in how they adhere to those beliefs.”

Not all chaplains are as stringent as to whether a “pattern of conduct” supports the authenticity of a soldiers’ religious attestations in their eyes. Army National Guard chaplain Maj. A’Shellarien Lang says she doesn’t “really dig into how long they’ve been in church and all of that kind of stuff because it’s really about their current reality of what they really believe. And in that moment – let’s suppose it’s a political decision, but they wrap it in religiosity – that’s still what they believe in that moment.”

Still, she is not the last word, and the likelihood of refusal takes its toll.

“So many of them come in thinking that I make the decision, and if they make this case, that it’s a done deal,” Lang said. “I don’t make the decision. And so when they find that out, it’s a kind of game-changer in the sense that they know that the process has to continue.”

“If in their heart and their mind, they say this is God’s will for my life, and if the answer is no, it’s going to shatter that faith because there’s no balance. There’s no room for God to say no,” she added. “When I create the space to say what if God says no, then that opens up another whole level of faith conversation.”

The AP purports to debunk the basis for religious objections by claiming the COVID vaccines “don’t contain fetal material.” In fact, the Johnson & Johnson vaccine was developed, produced, and tested with aborted fetal cells. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines were not developed or produced with the abortion-derived material but were tested using it.

While defenders of vaccine mandates are quick to point out that the military has long required soldiers to vaccinate against a range of diseases, the fact remains that previous vaccines were subjected to far more evaluation and development time before being put into widespread use than the COVID shots received during their accelerated clinical trials.

Vaccine defenders also note that this one-year development period was not starting from scratch, but rather relied on years of prior research into mRNA technology; and that one of the innovations of the Trump administration’s Operation Warp Speed was conducting various aspects of the development process concurrently rather than sequentially, eliminating delays unrelated to safety. However, those factors do not fully account for the condensing of clinical trial phases — each of which can take anywhere from 1-3 years on their own — to just three months apiece.

While cases of severe harm reported to the federal Vaccine Adverse Events Reporting System (VAERS) after taking COVID shots represent less than one percent of total doses administered in the United States, a 2010 report submitted to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services’ (HHS) Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) warned that VAERS caught “fewer than 1% of vaccine adverse events.” May reporting from NBC News quotes several mainstream experts acknowledging “gaps” in federal vaccine monitoring.

*LifeSiteNews has produced an extensive COVID-19 vaccines resources page. [View it here](#)*

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