



SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
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WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1000

AUG 09 2021

MEMORANDUM FOR ALL DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE EMPLOYEES

SUBJECT: Message to the Force

As many of you know, President Biden asked me to consider how and when we might add the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) vaccines to the list of those required for all Service members. So, over the last week, I have consulted closely with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretaries of the Military Departments, the Service Chiefs, and medical professionals. I appreciate greatly the advice and counsel they provided.

Based on these consultations and on additional discussions with leaders of the White House COVID Task Force, I want you to know that I will seek the President's approval to make the vaccines mandatory no later than mid-September, or immediately upon the U.S. Food and Drug Agency (FDA) licensure, whichever comes first.

By way of expectation, public reporting suggests the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine could achieve full FDA licensure early next month.

The intervening few weeks will be spent preparing for this transition. I have every confidence that Service leadership and your commanders will implement this new vaccination program with professionalism, skill, and compassion. We will have more to say about this as implementation plans are fully developed.

In the meantime, we will comply with the President's direction regarding additional restrictions and requirements for unvaccinated Federal personnel. Those requirements apply to those of you in uniform as well as our civilian and contractor personnel.

We will also be keeping a close eye on infection rates — which are on the rise now due to the Delta variant — and the impact these rates might have on our 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. I strongly encourage all DoD military and civilian personnel — as well as contractor personnel — to get vaccinated now and for military Service members to not wait for the mandate.

All FDA-authorized COVID-19 vaccines are safe and highly effective. They will protect you and your family. They will protect your unit, your ship, and your co-workers. And they will ensure we remain the most lethal and ready force in the world.

Get the shot. Stay healthy. Stay ready.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Ray O. Austin", is located in the bottom right corner of the page.