



August Message to the Military Health System Team

from the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, HON Thomas McCaffery

MHS Team:

August is Preventive Health month in the Military Health System. August is also national Immunization Awareness Month, reminding us of the importance of staying current on standard vaccines, especially for children. In a normal year, prevention means families getting inoculations and vaccines for children heading back to school. Of course, this is not a normal year. Not surprisingly, COVID-19 vaccine efforts have been getting a lot of attention. This provides us the opportunity to underscore how vital vaccines are for maintaining our individual health and public health. Routine vaccinations also prevent illnesses that can lead to unnecessary medical conditions, hospitalizations, and further strain on the health care system.

The Military Health System is fully engaged with COVID-19 vaccine development in the whole-of-government effort under Operation Warp Speed. OWS is leveraging resources from across the federal government, including the DoD. We're well positioned in the MHS to help rapidly advance the science and speed the nation toward a safe and effective vaccine. Operation Warp Speed is an unprecedented leap toward an historic breakthrough that will save countless lives.

Some updates on current MHS issues:

Force Health Protection Guidance (Supplement 12): The Department continues to update current policy and practice guidance in the fight against COVID-19. The latest COVID-19 Force Health Protection guidance focuses on Service members, family members, civilian employees, and contractors traveling to and from foreign countries during the pandemic. View the guidance here: <https://go.usa.gov/xfzbX>.

MHS GENESIS: Congratulations to Mr. Bill Tinston for his selection as the Director of the Federal Electronic Health Record Modernization office, which oversees the joint DoD/VA deployment of a common electronic health record. The MHS GENESIS team also welcomes BG Ned Appenzeller as the new Functional Champion. Both of these leaders join a team that continues implementing the groundbreaking move toward a single electronic health record. 'Wave NELLIS' is advancing toward a Sept. 26 go-live date, with 'Wave PENDLETON' shortly after, on Oct. 31. The benefits will be a massive transformation of how we manage care that will be felt by patients as well as providers. It's exciting to note the progress of the DHA and the Defense Healthcare Management Systems' Program Executive Office in deepening the working relationship and supporting both Veterans Affairs and the U.S. Coast Guard as they also prepare to go live.

Joint Medical Executive Skills Institute Capstone. I was honored to address the JMESI Capstone course this month. Kudos to the team putting on this important 4-day event. The virtual environment didn't dampen the exchange of information, with senior leaders covering the spectrum of how the MHS supports military readiness and military beneficiary health - now and into the future. From the insightful questions and comments I heard, it is clear we have a dynamic crop of MHS leaders already in place.

Operations Security. One note on something we should never neglect - OPSEC. Operations security is critical to protecting our forces, ensuring mission success, and implementing the National Defense Strategy. In the COVID-19 environment, it is everyone's duty to be deliberate and careful with all classified, controlled unclassified, and pre-decisional policy information and proposals. Secretary Esper's recently announced requirement for refresher training on OPSEC awareness is timely and necessary. All DoD personnel, including civilians, service members and on-site contractors, must complete the training within 60 days of the Secretary's July 20 memo. Read the memo here: <https://go.usa.gov/xfVb4>. And you can ask your local training coordinators for help accessing the training.

In closing, I'll note ongoing discussion within the Department about how the MHS can best meet military readiness and continue to provide high-quality health care. The interest in what we do is expected, because what we do affects so many people so deeply. The biggest transformation of military health care in decades was launched by the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act. Even through the pandemic, we remain focused on integrating enterprise management for the best results. What the MHS is accomplishing right now is unprecedented. And every member of the team should feel proud. Thank you for what you've done and for what I know you will continue to do in the months ahead to support our military departments and our 9.6 million beneficiaries.

Tom