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No active duty COVID deaths since vaccination deadlines, but reserve deaths continue

By Meghann Myers

 Thursday, Jan 20



About 75 percent of National Guard and Reserve troops are at least partially vaccinated against COVID-19. (Senior Airman Neil Mabini/Air National Guard)

Over 98% of the active duty military is at least partially vaccinated against COVID-19, directly reflected in a sharp drop in active duty deaths since the delta variant surge that began in late fall and lasted into November.

For going on two months, the only deaths have been in the reserve component, where vaccination deadlines stretched to the new year for some of the services, or until the end of June for the Army.



As of Wednesday, 90 total service members have died of COVID-19 complications, according to the Defense Department's most recent data. That includes two more reservists whose deaths were reported in the last week:

- Army Reserve Spc. Cruz Rocha III, 36, died Jan. 12.



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He was assigned to the 11th Military Police Brigade in Los Alamitos, California.

- Air National Guard Master Sgt. Brian James, 55, died Jan. 16. He was assigned to the 142nd Maintenance Squadron in Portland, Oregon.

The majority of troop deaths have been in the reserve component, including 43 from Army reservists alone.

Dec. 15, the Army's deadline, marked the final day that active duty troops could be unvaccinated without facing consequences, including involuntary separation.

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Six service members have died since then, all of them reservists, with the most recent active duty death occurring in late November.

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According to DoD data, three service members have contracted COVID-19 and died despite vaccination; two were partially vaccinated, while one had received the single-dose Johnson and Johnson vaccine.

To date, roughly 75% of the reserve component is at least partially vaccinated, compared to about 85% of the overall force.

Hundreds of troops have been involuntarily separated for refusing to get vaccinated, many of whom have applied for medical, religious or other administrative exemptions but been denied.

The Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force have all implemented policies to discharge service members who continue to refuse the vaccine. The Army is expected to put out its policy this month.

About **Meghann Myers**

Meghann Myers is the Pentagon bureau chief at Military Times.

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