

## NOAA CORPS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### GETTING MEDICAL CARE WHEN YOU ARE SICK OR INJURED

NOAA Corps officers can access healthcare while traveling for business or pleasure, on deployment or at home or work by coordinating care with TRICARE. NOAA Corps officers are required to familiarize themselves with sick leave, convalescent leave and maternity leave policies and procedures covered in the NOAA Corps Directives (NCD), [Chapter 6, Part 4](#).

**1. I know that NOAA Corps follows the U.S. Coast Guard regarding medical standards for fitness for duty. Where can I find a copy of these medical standards?**

All medical standards for fitness for duty are prescribed in the USCG Medical Manual COMDTINST M6000.1E (most current revision). This manual is located at: <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg1/cg112/cg1121/docs/pdf/CIM6000.1E.pdf>. As a NOAA Corps officer, it is your responsibility to become familiar with and maintain these medical standards.

**2. I have just arrived to my new duty assignment. How do I find a TRICARE participating Primary Care Manager (PCM) in my new town of residence?**

NOAA Corps officers must complete a TRICARE Prime enrollment form whenever there is a change in duty station. You are encouraged to call the TRICARE regional contractor for your geographic location to determine whether or not you reside in a Prime Service Area (TRICARE North Region; 1-877-874-2273; TRICARE South Region; 1-800-444-5445; TRICARE West Region; 1-877-988-9378). The TRICARE regional contractor will complete your enrollment over the phone, assist you with finding a participating primary care manager (PCM) and can update the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) with your change in phone number, e-mail address, home and duty station address.

You can complete the TRICARE Prime Enrollment Form on line at:

<http://www.tricare.mil/Welcome/Enrollment/TP.aspx>

You can update DEERS calling 1-800-538-9552 or by visiting:

<https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/address/beneficiary/consent?continueToUrl=%2Fappj%2Faddresses%2Fbeneficiary%2Finit.do>

Remember, your assignment to an MTF or civilian PCM is based on whether you reside in a prime service area and if your accessibility to a PCM's office is located within a 30 minute drive from your residence address. Specialty care should be available within a one hour drive time from your residence.

**3. What will happen if I do not complete the TRICARE Prime enrollment process?**

Enrollment should be completed prior to the arrival at your new duty station and BEFORE you become ill and require medical treatment. NOAA Corps officers who do not enroll or update their enrollment upon change of duty station may experience difficulties in getting specialty referrals as well as delays in scheduling medical appointments. Officers can receive emergency medical care and treatment without prior authorization and will not incur financial liability. Officers not enrolled in TRICARE but require urgent care must contact TRICARE to obtain pre-

authorization prior to receiving medical treatment in order to avoid financial liability. Routine medical care and treatment requires prior enrollment in TRICARE.

**4. If I get sick where do I go for medical care and treatment?**

The first thing you should do is call your PCM's office (no prior approval from TRICARE is required). If your PCM cannot see you, he/she may refer you to urgent care for which a referral is required. If you need medical care and are unable to reach your PCM after business hours (7 PM to 7 AM) you should call your TRICARE regional contractor who can provide you with a "one-time authorization" for urgent care services. Your TRICARE regional contractor will provide you with guidance regarding the type of service and medical facility from which you will need to receive care. Generally, medical care will be rendered at the MTF where your PCM is located. If you are enrolled in TRICARE Prime Remote (TPR), care will be rendered at the facility where your PCM has privileges.

**5. What do I do if my PCM orders a special test/procedure or refers me to see another physician or specialist?**

Your PCM sends a referral from his/her office to the designated TRICARE regional contractor for coordination with the Military Medical Support Office (MMSO) or NOAA's Medical Administration Branch (MAB) for those NOAA Corps officers registered as TPR. The authorization will be processed and you will receive an e-mail from TRICARE which contains the web site address <http://www.mytricare.com> to access the completed authorization and review your claims information. You must set up a log in ID and password to use this site. Monitor the TRICARE website for authorization status or call the TRICARE regional contractor. When the authorization is approved a hard copy of the authorization will follow in the mail within 7 to 10 days of completion. More than one office visit with the specialist may be approved on the same authorization. You should make a copy of the authorization for your records and take it with you to the appointment with the specialist. This same process is followed if a specialist refers you to another specialist. TRICARE will automatically notify the physician you are going to see, but it is always safe to take a copy with you to the appointment. However, it will be accessible on the TRICARE website (<http://www.mytricare.com>). If there is a question, call your TRICARE regional contractor.

**6. If I get hurt and need to go to the emergency room what should I do?**

If your situation is an emergency you should go the nearest and closest Emergency Room. If possible, contact your PCM first for guidance. If your PCM is unavailable after business hours you should contact your TRICARE regional contractor. You should notify Commissioned Personnel Center's (CPC) Chief, MAB (CDR Hobson-Powell), at (301-713-7718) as soon as possible, follow all instructions given by the physician and follow-up with your PCM if specialty treatment is required. All emergency medical care should be reported to your PCM immediately after the medical emergency in order to coordinate any referrals that may be required.

**7. What medical records does CPC require if I see a doctor or go to an emergency room?**

As prescribed in [NCD 03101](#), officers are responsible for providing **complete** information regarding matters of their health to CPC's MAB. Therefore, it is your responsibility to submit **all** medical records from **all** medical providers and other related medical visits. All medical records include, but are not limited to: operative notes, physician progress notes, nurses' notes,

lab test and x-ray results, diagnostic procedures, admission and/or discharge summaries, and emergency room records. All such documents must be submitted via the Medical OPF or mail as soon as they are available after each medical appointment to:

Commissioned Personnel Center  
ATTN: Chief, Medical Administration Branch  
8403 Colesville Road, Suite 500  
Silver Spring, MD, 20910-3282  
Secured E-mail to: [Elizabeth.Hobson-Powell@noaa.gov](mailto:Elizabeth.Hobson-Powell@noaa.gov).

At the time of your appointment or your emergency room visit you should obtain from the physician his/her recommendation for duties or physical activity restriction(s). This recommendation must be submitted to the Chief, MAB, along with all other medical documents.

#### **8. How do I obtain these medical records?**

You may ask for your medical records at the time of the appointment or emergency room visit but chances are likely that ALL records (including lab results, x-ray reports) will not be available at that time. It is best to sign a formal release of medical information at the time of your appointment or visit for release of ALL medical records. You should follow-up in person or by phone call in a week. It is your responsibility to make sure all medical records are submitted to the MAB as soon as they are available.

#### **9. What happens if I do not submit the requested medical records?**

Failure to provide all the medical information and/or failure to provide this information when requested will delay any official change in your fitness for duty status, and potentially place you in an Absence Without Leave (AWOL) status. CPC will also be notified.

#### **10. Why does CPC mandate submission of all medical records?**

CPC's MAB is the custodian of your official medical file. Medical records for any medical treatment received during your active duty service with the NOAA Corps must be submitted for inclusion in your official medical file as described in Part 1, [NCD 03101](#). Medical records serve as supporting documentation of any service related injuries or illnesses. Additionally, this documentation is used to determine your medical eligibility for permanent appointment, promotion (Part 3, [NCD 04302, Physical Qualifications](#), page 21) and sea/dive/aviation duty.

Submission of these medical records will also assist you in filing a medical claim (if applicable) with the Veteran's Administration upon separation or retirement from the NOAA Corps. It is the NOAA Corps officer's responsibility to ensure that all medical records and supporting documentation are obtained from his/her health care provider. Documentation should include the following but are not limited to: progress notes, lab reports, diagnostic testing reports (EKG's, x-rays, etc). Documents must be submitted to the MAB immediately after your scheduled appointment or as soon as they become available in order to assist the MAB and the Director of Health Services (DHS) when applicable in determining your current fitness for duty status. A doctor's note or letter that provides a fitness for duty recommendation is insufficient supporting evidence to make a determination.

**11. What should I do if my physician tells me I should not work two days or less?**

You should notify your leave granting authority as soon as possible. Forward all medical records for treatment received during your injury/illness to the MAB as soon as they become available. Submission of NOAA Form 56-12 is not required.

**12. What is the process that I will follow if my illness or injury exceeds more than two days?**

Officers exceeding two sick leave days must report to the nearest MTF for treatment or seek care from his/her PCM (if enrolled in TPR). Sick leave exceeding two days is not charged to your leave account, but must be documented using a [NOAA Form 56-12](#). Submit the form to your leave granting authority immediately upon your return. If your physician does not address what your current duty status is, you should ask him/her specifically. NOAA Corps officers must provide the MAB with a copy of all medical records related to the treatment rendered for the current injury/illness.

**13. What is the process that I will follow if my illness or injury exceeds more than seven days?**

If absence from your duty station occurs as a result of injury, illness and/or surgery, is likely to exceed seven calendar days, is likely to prevent the NOAA Corps officer from performing his/her usual duties and is under the care of a physician (PCM or other health care provider), the NOAA Corps officer must provide the MAB with a copy of all medical records regarding nature of the injury/illness and a statement from his/her primary care provider indicating prognosis, treatment plan, limitations and anticipated return to duty date. Documentation should include, but is not limited to: progress notes, lab reports, x-ray reports, diagnostic procedures, physical therapy, emergency room treatment, operative reports, etc. The officer is responsible for notifying his/her immediate supervisor, DHS, and Chief, MAB, at CPC at the onset of any illness or injury exceeding more than two days.

The above medical records will be forwarded to the DHS. Officers should request medical records after each visit to his/her medical provider and forward these to the MAB as soon as they become available.

The DHS will review the medical documentation forwarded by the MAB and will determine fitness for duty. If an officer is deemed temporarily not fit for duty (TNFFD), the DHS will send the officer an official letter via e-mail and USPS mail regarding his/her fitness for duty status. The letter formally authorizes the absence from work and will contain specific instructions regarding current duty status, required medical documentation and submission, and other instructions as necessary. Medical documentation must be submitted at time of request or as soon as medical records becomes available.

Again, sick leave is not charged to the officer's leave account. However, a [NOAA Form 56-12](#) Request and Authorization for Leave requesting convalescent leave must be submitted if the illness or injury is expected to result in an absence from work greater than 7 days. The type of leave is marked as "Other" and "Convalescent leave" is written in on the line provided. This form must be signed and dated by the officer's supervisor and be accompanied by a letter from the medical provider that clearly states the name of specific illness/injury/surgery being

performed, the start and end dates of this leave period and the medical provider's full name, title, signature, and date. This letter and Form 56-12 should be sent confidentially to the Chief, MAB, who will forward to the DHS. The DHS will review and make a recommendation to CPC. This request for convalescent leave must also receive approval by the Director, CPC. The DHS will notify you of medical authorization and will forward the 56-12 to CPC. You will need to contact the Director, CPC to follow-up on administrative authorization. Convalescent leave is not approved until you receive notification or both medical and administrative authorization. All medical standards for fitness for duty are prescribed in the USCG Medical Manual COMDTINST M6000.1E (April 2011).

**14. What should I do if I am planning a medical procedure, surgery or treatment?**

If you are planning a medical procedure, surgery, or other medical treatment you should first consult the USCG Medical Manual COMDTINST M6000.1E dated April 2011, [Chapter 3, Section F](#). There are certain procedures/surgeries/treatments that require specific follow-up testing or require a certain amount of time to pass or in order to document the stability of your medical condition before your return to duty can be considered. If you are unable to locate your procedure, surgery, or treatment in this manual or have questions, please contact the Chief, MAB (office: 301-713-7718, [Elizabeth.Hobson-Powell@noaa.gov](mailto:Elizabeth.Hobson-Powell@noaa.gov)). All elective procedures, surgeries, and/or treatments should be planned far enough in advance to allow for the resolution of any complications and performed at a time and far enough in advance as not to interfere with the mission of the ships/aircraft and schedules.

Officers who have a planned surgery, medical procedure, or treatment that results in absences from work greater than 7 days are required to request convalescent leave (Form 56-12) well in advance of the scheduled date of the surgery/treatment/procedure (see Question 13 for how to complete this form).

**15. After being on convalescent leave, what do I need to do if my physician recommends that I should be placed on light or desk duty now?**

If your attending physician upgrades your TNFFD status to light or desk duty before returning to full and unrestricted duty, you must provide the Chief, MAB with a written copy of this recommendation. It must be signed and dated by your attending physician and must specify any physical activity restrictions (if applicable). NOAA Corps officers must submit all requested medical records from this visit along with the physician's recommendation. These documents are sent to the DHS to determine fitness for light or desk duty. Light or desk duty is official when you are notified by the DHS. As a reminder, light or desk duty is not possible when you are assigned to a ship. If you are assigned to a ship and are deemed fit for light or desk duty, you will be detailed to a marine center or Port Office (or similar) for that time period.

**16. What do I do if I attempt to receive medical services at a MTF and am asked for a Unit Identification Code (UIC)?**

A UIC identifies your active duty service unit. The NOAA Corps does not utilize this code. When a UIC is requested by an MTF employee, officers should:

1. Inform him/her that NOAA Corps does not use a UIC, and
2. Provide them with the code "5555" which is classified as unknown.

Officers with a change in duty station from one region to another region must register for healthcare at the Patient Administration Office within the new MTF, and provide the representative with the above code prior to changing his/her enrollment status with the TRICARE office. Any questions or concerns from the MTF should be directed to CDR Hobson-Powell, Chief, Medical Administration Branch at (301) 713-7718.

**17. What do I do when I am ready to return to full and unrestricted duty?**

When you are ready to return to full duty you must provide the Chief, MAB with a signed and dated letter from your attending physician indicating that you are able to return to full and unrestricted duty with a release date from his/her care included. This recommendation must be based upon an examination that is current and conducted after the surgery/illness/injury episode. It is your responsibility to ensure that all of the requested information and documentation is submitted to the Chief, MAB.

Failure to submit all of the requested information will delay your return to full duty status. Upon receipt, the requested information will be forwarded to the DHS who will review the medical records and issue you a formal letter of medical clearance to return to full and unrestricted duty. Remember that you are not officially medically cleared to return to duty in any capacity until notified in writing by the DHS.

A written statement from your medical provider indicating that you are “fit for duty” or “fit for light or desk duty” is not considered objective information. Therefore, without supporting medical documentation such as the medical records and other related documents outlined above, this statement will be considered insufficient information to make a determination. NOAA Corps officers are not authorized to return to duty of any kind after sick or convalescent leave until official notice to do so is received from the DHS.

All requested medical records and other information must be sent via Medical OPF/fax/mail (secure e-mail Accellion) to:

Commissioned Personnel Center  
 ATTN: Chief, Medical Administration Branch  
 8403 Colesville Road, Suite 500  
 Silver Spring, MD, 20910-3282  
 Secured E-mail to: [Elizabeth.Hobson-Powell@noaa.gov](mailto:Elizabeth.Hobson-Powell@noaa.gov).

**18. Who should I contact if I have further questions regarding my TRICARE benefits?**

There are four available options to assist you with obtaining further information. These are:

- A. Contact your TRICARE regional contractor (refer to Question 2 above for contact phone numbers)
- B. Go to <http://www.mytricare.com>
- C. Go to the CPC web site at <http://www.corpscpc.noaa.gov/medical/medical.html>
- D. Contact Chief, Medical Administration Branch at 301-713-7718.

**19. Do I need a written denial from a military dental facility to see a civilian dentist? I am close to a base dental facility, they don't have space.**

You do not need a written denial from your military dental treatment facility (DTF) in order to see a civilian dentist. However, all active duty service members (ADSMs) must contact the Active Duty Dental Plan-Remote (ADDP)( 1-866-984-2337) prior to receiving dental services from a civilian network dentist in order to obtain an appointment control number (ACN). The ACN provides ADSMs authorization to receive dental services from a TRICARE network civilian. The ACN is required for all dental appointments which include initial, annual and continuation of dental treatment. United Concordia will coordinate an appointment for routine dental care within 21 calendar days of request and 28 days for specialty dental care. Benefits will be provided as delineated in the [The Active Duty Dental Benefit](#) (Attachment 2 of the ADDP contract). Frequency limitations noted in the benefits attachment do not apply to DTF-referred ADSMs. If you receive initial dental services from a military DTF and are referred for private sector dental care, you are only authorized to receive the services prescribed on the DTF's referral. No alternate or additional services may be provided unless approved in advance by the military DTF. You must contact your military DTF if the civilian dentist determines you need additional care which is not included on the initial referral.

**20. Will CAPT Powers and/or CPC ever have access to the DoD electronic medical records so that I don't have to request paper copies after each appointment?**

NOAA's medical personnel do not have access to DoD's electronic medical records. DoD's electronic medical records are only accessible to MTF medical providers and the patient. It is important that you obtain a copy of your medical records during your scheduled appointment or shortly thereafter.

**21. How do I obtain electronic copies of my medical records for treatment received at a DoD MTF?**

Personal health data (PHD) may be obtained by using the online Department of Defense (DoD) Blue Button. At this time, the Blue Button only allows you to access and print personal (DoD) health data such as: laboratory results, medication profile, allergy profile and problem lists by logging into TRICARE Online (TOL) with your Common Access Card (CAC) by visiting [www.tricareonline.com](http://www.tricareonline.com). You will need to click on the "Blue Button" in order to access your PHD.