

3 April 2020: Letter from Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) regarding COVID-19

Dear Families and Members of the Canadian Armed Forces,

I want to thank all of you, across the entire Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), military and Defence Team, Regular and Reserve, who continue to protect and prepare the force. We have experienced very few cases of COVID-19 in the defence community so far, thanks in large part to your individual discipline and efforts to preserve the force.

To set the force, safe and healthy, for Operation LASER, our Deputy Minister, along with our senior military and civilian leadership are taking the necessary steps to get Task Forces and specialist teams ready for operations. Our medical intelligence team and our Surgeon General have done superb work in advising senior leadership on the virus and precautions you will need to implement in operations. This will include issuing personal protective equipment (PPE) to all who deploy on operations. You will be issued and trained in its use before engaging on any task that would put you at risk. The Canadian Joint Operations Command (CJOC) team are planning with 1st Canadian Division and the Regional Joint Task Force Commanders and staff to ensure a rapid and effective response across the country. We have already responded to a number of requests for assistance and will be ready to do much more, particularly as we approach flood and forest fire season.

To ready the force, we have taken measures to provide a large number of Primary Reservists with the option of a Class C (full time employment) contract through to August 31st 2020. I envision the Reserve Force serving initially within or close to their local communities, but prepared to regroup rapidly should operations demand.

We have also had to make tough decisions to cancel events such as those that are part of our Canadian fabric. To that end, the Ceremonial Guard will be cancelled for the summer of 2020. We are reviewing options to see if and when it will be possible to mount the National Sentry Program at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. As for our demonstration teams, such as the Snowbirds, the CF-18 Demo Team and the SkyHawks, the show season may well be cancelled. Change of command parades are prohibited and changes of command will be marked by small office ceremonies that respect health and safety.

Our current dispersed posture will continue to at least 30 April, unless tasked for operations. That means your place of duty remains at home, safe and ready for operations. Stay connected to your colleagues and chain of command for details about operational tasks.

Regarding family support, your chain of command will make every effort to cater to individual family circumstances, while still ensuring we continue to deliver the assistance Canadians need. I encourage you to take early steps to ensure you, and your family, are ready.

The Active Posting Season (APS) continues to be worked on and a CANFORGEN relating to this year's APS has been released. I know questions exist and that every move has its own unique challenges. The APS is a priority for my senior leadership and for you, so we all need to work together to find solutions.

All CANFORGENs can be found on the Canadian Armed Forces Application, downloadable on your mobile devices from normal online stores. The CAF App is a credible source of information. My Twitter account, @CDS_Canada_CEMD gives you access directly to my messages. Service Commanders and senior leaders also have social media accounts and official CAF websites are also means of finding important information that is helpful and more importantly, true. To aide each of you, and your respective chains of command, Commander Military Personnel Command, has stood up a team whose job it will be to answer your questions. It is ready now to receive your queries on issues related to APS, Releases and Compensation, and aspects related to COVID-19 decisions at CMPARC.CRACPM@forces.gc.ca or call 1-833-445-1182.

We have already started planning to re-start the individual training system in our colleges and schools while accounting for the realities and protocols demanded by COVID-19. We have paused all recruiting intake and individual training, but we continued to process files. Recruiters, using technology and virtual means, continued to process applications and achieved a milestone in having conducted an enrollment this past week via video conference.

Although there is a long weekend approaching, I must, in the strongest terms, ask you to stay focused on the mission at hand. Your mission remains to stay fit and healthy. Your home is your place of duty and where you must stay as much as possible. You and your family are too important to risk to COVID19 infection and we must not contribute to spreading the virus. This is a long haul, but we must stay the course. When the call comes to deploy, you must be ready.

Stay Fit to Fight!

J.H. Vance
General