

# Air Force Grants Nine Religious Exemptions to COVID Vaccine Mandate, Thousands Pending



The Air Force on Tuesday said it has granted nine service members religious exemptions to its COVID vaccine mandate, but wouldn't comment on whether the service members were already on terminal leave or on their way out of the ranks.

Eight of the exemptions were granted after being requested, the Air Force said in its [weekly COVID update](#). The other exemption was granted on appeal after it was originally denied.

The Air Force is still processing 2,556 requests for exemptions and 732 appeals. So far, it has turned down over 3,200 requests for exemptions and more than 440 appeals.

So far, the Air Force has kicked out 142 airmen for refusing to get vaccinated.

“The Department of the Air Force determined the service members’ accommodations could be supported with no impact to mission readiness,” spokeswoman Ann Stefanek [said](#) in an emailed statement.

The Marine Corps [last month](#) became the first military branch to grant two religious exemptions, but none of the members were actually serving in the Marines.

In a harsh rebuke of the military’s handling of its COVID vaccine policy, a federal district court judge in Florida issued a temporary order preventing the military from disciplining two officers who refused the shot on religious grounds. The order is the latest ruling temporarily preventing the military from punishing troops over their refusal to get the COVID vaccine.

“The military is well aware of the frailty of their arguments in defense of their practices,” Federal District Court Judge Steven Merryday said in his Feb. 2 [ruling](#). “The record creates a strong inference that the services are discriminatorily and systematically denying religious exemptions without a meaningful and fair hearing.”

In his reasoning, Merryday wrote the military failed to prove troops who do not follow the COVID vaccination order are adversely affecting the American public, referencing the exemption denial letters and [Austin’s announcement](#) regarding the necessity for the mandate.

Merryday’s said “the two service members are very likely to prevail on their claim that their respective branch of the military has wrongfully denied a religious exemption from COVID-19 vaccination,” and made it clear that while this motion was granted-in-part, he believes it will be extended.

In a separate case, a Texas judge in January [ordered a temporary injunction](#) against the punishment of a group of Navy SEALs. A second hearing to determine whether the injunction

will be extended past Feb. 11 is scheduled for Feb. 10.