



# Military families cope with new travel curbs because of coronavirus

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The travel restrictions take effect Monday and will go through May 11, the Department of Defense said.

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Travel restrictions that have stopped moves to new duty assignments are the latest challenge to military families brought on by the coronavirus outbreak.

An Army spouse at Fort Bragg said the restrictions will create challenges for families on post. Another spouse put off a planned trip to the beach with her children after the restrictions were announced. The new rules already are impacting real estate deals for families with contracts to sell their homes before they left.

Military families usually plan for moves months in advance, with many taking place in the summer when children aren't in school. Service members often move to new assignments about every three years, sometimes sooner, depending on the unit and the work the service member does.

The Department of Defense issued orders Thursday prohibiting service members and their families from traveling domestically because of concerns about the coronavirus. The new travel restrictions, which also apply to civilians

who work for the Defense Department, halt all domestic travel, including permanent change-of-station and temporary duty, according to a statement released by the department.

Troops also will only be able to travel locally during their leaves, it said.

The restrictions are in response to the new coronavirus, known as COVID-19. The virus started in China and has spread around the world.

Lt. Gen. Michael E. Kurilla, commander of 18th Airborne Corps and Fort Bragg, told the post community that permanent change-of-station moves are on hold until May 11. Those who have already left Fort Bragg for a new duty station should keep going, while those who haven't left should report to the command they were leaving, he said in an update posted Sunday on Fort Bragg's Facebook page.

"If you have shipped household goods, but have not departed, contact your chain of command for assistance," he said.

Kurilla also said soldiers and civilian workers assigned to Fort Bragg will "stop movement" and stay within 50 miles of the post and/or their local residence.

"Transit to Fort Bragg is authorized for those that live more than 50 miles away," he said. "Coordinate with your chain of command for any additional travel."

While the coronavirus outbreak has caused increasing concern around the country, military families face unique challenges. Soldiers returning from deployment go into quarantine instead of celebrating at reunion ceremonies. Troops who are often on standby for a national emergency wonder if they'll be called on to help during the public health crisis. Families who worry about battle danger now grow anxious about a disease that might have been picked up overseas.

A Fort Bragg source said it's going to be hard for units at the installation to identify soldiers and families affected by the restrictions because many of those soldiers already had paperwork approved and have signed out of their units ahead of the order.

They may try signing back into their units to figure out a solution, the source said.

The source said soldiers with new assignments to Germany, or even another U.S. state, could be affected and may not have a place to stay.

However, the source expects Army Community Services to know more Monday because that is who those soldiers should be reaching out to if they need assistance.

### **'It just impacts us all'**

An Army spouse at Fort Bragg said the travel restrictions will cause problems for families on post.

The spouse, who did not want to be identified, has been at Fort Bragg for about a year. She said she and her family are not scheduled to leave the area but she knows some families who are frustrated by the restrictions.

"It just impacts us all," she said.

The restrictions will create challenges for Fort Bragg families who plan ahead before moves, the spouse said.

"You have a lot to do to be sure your family is ready to travel and move," she said.

Army spouses often have to handle numerous tasks on post and look for a place to live in the new location, she said.

"It takes a lot," she said. "It's those things we have to consider."

The spouse said some Fort Bragg couples might have to cancel anniversary trips and similar celebrations because of the travel restrictions. But she said Army spouses want to support the soldiers.

"That's all part of the service," she said.

The other spouse said she decided to do the right thing and stay home instead of going to Myrtle Beach.

“I was planning on going but after the schools closed and DOD put out the restrictions that really made me think twice about my decision,” she said.

Jimmy Townsend, owner of Townsend Real Estate, said real estate agents are dealing with families facing challenges because of the restrictions.

“We’re going to have to renegotiate some contracts,” he said.

Townsend said the Fayetteville area sees a constant amount of residents moving in and out because of nearby Fort Bragg, the country’s largest Army installation by population with about 54,000 troops. He said he already knows of one client who is selling a house that has had to move the closing day to a later date.

“It will have an effect,” he said. “We just don’t know yet how much.”

Area agencies that support troops and their families say they are standing by to help.

Michelle Baumgarten, associate director of Fort Bragg Armed Services YMCA, said the organization’s Food Pantry will help soldiers and their families if needed. The group also can refer those in need to other groups, she said.

“At this time, no we have not heard specifically about families caught in limbo with the PCS cancellations,” she said.

Brian Knight, the Sandhills area operations director for the USO of North Carolina, said his group hasn’t gotten any requests from military families needing help because of the restrictions.

“I imagine we probably will,” he said.

Barry Morris, a spokesman for the USO of North Carolina, said the organization is ready to help. The group is consolidating its supplies for service members and their families who need help, he said.

The USO of North Carolina is getting together water, personal hygiene items such as toothbrushes and toothpaste, and “creature comforts” such as DVDs, board games, playing cards, books and magazines, Morris said.

“We’re going to do everything we can to bring the USO to them,” he said.

Lt. Col. Mike Burns, an 82nd Airborne Division spokesman, said division officials are aware of the guidelines' consequences.

"We're doing everything we can to help any soldier affected by this new change in policy," he said.

Exceptions to the travel restrictions may be granted in compelling cases in which the travel is mission-essential, for humanitarian reasons or warranted because of extreme hardship, the DOD statement said.

The restrictions take effect Monday and will go through May 11, according to the statement.

The move is the latest example of how military life on Fort Bragg is changing because of COVID-19.

Soldiers who are returning from deployments are being quarantined for two weeks.

Schools on post will close from Tuesday until March 30.

Womack Army Medical Center is restricting visitors in the hospital's newborn unit to protect patients against the coronavirus.

The All American Marathon and other activities, which were scheduled for March 28 and 29, have been canceled. Last year, more than 3,800 people ran in the marathon and its sister races, the Mike to Mike Half Marathon and All American 5K.

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