

# **U.S. ARMY MEDICAL CENTER OF EXCELLENCE (MEDCoE) HOLIDAY BLOCK LEAVE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ):**

**(Last updated: 9 December 2021)**

## **Q1: I AM A DOD (DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE) ID CARD HOLDER, WHERE DO I GOTO PICK-UP MY SOLDIER BY POV (PERSONALLY OWNED VEHICLE) FOR HOLIDAYBLOCK LEAVE?**

**A1:** DOD ID Card holders with Base access will be permitted to pick-up their Soldier for POV (Privately Owned Vehicle) travel to HBL on JBSA-Fort Sam Houston. POV pick-up will be in the Battalion areas. Locations vary by unit. For operational security, exact pick-up locations will not be available on social media but will be provided to Families in advance/upon approval of their base access. Unit contact information is available at the following link: [Home | U.S. Army Medical Center of Excellence](#), or [www.medcoe.army.mil/32d-medbde](http://www.medcoe.army.mil/32d-medbde)

## **Q2: HOW DO FAMILY MEMBERS WHO DO NOT HAVE BASE ACCESS PICK-UP THEIR SOLDIER BY POV (PERSONALLY OWNED VEHICLE) FOR HBL?**

**A2:** Those Family members who do not have base access but would like to pick-up their Soldier by POV for Holiday Block Leave will be sponsored by their Soldier's Company Commander. Families will be allowed access to post once their information (Full Name, Social Security Number, Driver's License and Vehicle Tag Number) has been collected/received by the Company and submitted to 502 Security Forces. This will occur as soon as possible in advance of HBL pick-up date. POV pick up will be in the Battalion areas. Exact pick-up locations will not be available on social media but will be provided to Families in advance/upon approval of their base access. MEDCoE unit contact information is available at the following link: [Home | U.S. Army Medical Center of Excellence](#) or [www.medcoe.army.mil/32d-medbde](http://www.medcoe.army.mil/32d-medbde)

## **Q3: WHAT MODES OF TRAVEL ARE AUTHORIZED FOR HOLIDAY BLOCK LEAVE?**

**A3:** The majority of Soldiers will depart via Air travel. However, there are Soldiers who have authorized travel via other modes to include bus and POV (privately owned vehicle). No matter the method of travel, safety is our primary concern. There will be leaders and drill-sergeants at all of the major travel nodes during Holiday Block Leave movement days.

## **Q4: WHAT DATES WILL SOLDIERS BE TRAVELING TO AND FROM MEDCoE?**

**A4:** The majority of HBL dates fall within a departure window of December 17-21 and a return window of January 1-3. Soldiers are working with their units to determine the best travel dates based on course requirements.

## **Q5: HOW MANY MEDCoE TRAINEE'S WILL BE TRAVELING THIS HOLIDAY BLOCK LEAVE SEASON?**

**A5:** Approximately 3,000 Soldiers could participate. Trainees and Soldiers will depart using various modes of transportation to include air, bus and privately owned vehicles (POVs). In past years, MEDCoE has averaged a 1-5% stay back population during HBL. We have established a hold company/Staff Duty Offices and holiday activities for trainees/Soldiers remaining on the installation to ensure remaining Soldiers are well taken care of. HBL Hold Company 24/7 Duty Numbers: 210-596-7143 or 210-241-2944 or 210-618-9326.

## **Q6: IS IT SAFE TO CONDUCT HOLIDAY BLOCKLEAVE DESPITE COVID-19 AND VARIANT CASES INCREASING IN SOME PARTS OF THE COUNTRY?**

**A6:** The operational tempo of both the trainees and cadre makes this leave vital to the well-

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being of our Soldiers and their families. U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), the Center of Initial Military Training (CIMT) and MEDCoE have developed comprehensive mitigation measures to ensure a safe reintegration from leave. 100% of returning Soldiers and cadre will be screened for signs and symptoms of illness/COVID-19. The unvaccinated and symptomatic Soldiers will also be tested for COVID-19.

### **Q7: HOW DOES THE ARMY PLAN TO MITIGATE THE SPREAD OF COVID-19/VARIANTS ASSOLDIERS IN TRAINING TRAVEL ACROSS THE COUNTRY?**

**A7:** Soldiers in training have become adept in those techniques proven most successful in containing the spread of the virus: frequent handwashing, wearing a mask, practicing social distancing, and avoiding areas with high infection rates. Additionally, the vast majority of our trainees are fully vaccinated which adds an extra layer of protection against severe illness or death from COVID. As they return home, we expect Soldiers to continue virus mitigation measures. Prior to departing, leaders and drill sergeants will brief Soldiers on their responsibilities to mitigate risk during holiday leave. Soldiers will wear face masks during travel and MEDCoE will position drill sergeants at the airport to support and monitor Soldiers. It will take both Soldier discipline and engaged leaders to ensure HBL is a success this year.

### **Q8: WILL THE ARMY PAY FOR TRAINEES AND SOLDIERS TO TRAVEL HOME FOR THE HOLIDAY BLOCK LEAVE SEASON?**

**A8.** Soldiers pay for their own travel expenses when opting to go on Holiday Block Leave. There are a variety of service organizations who gift vouchers to Soldiers to offset transportation costs. Soldiers in need will be directed to these services.

### **Q9: HOW DOES THE MEDCoE PLAN TO TEST SOLDIERS LEAVING AND RETURNING TO JBSA-FORT SAM HOUSTON?**

**A9:** To mitigate the COVID-19 risk, unvaccinated Soldiers will be tested prior to Holiday Block Leave and upon their return. Any Soldiers (vaccinated or unvaccinated) who have COVID symptoms will also be tested prior to departure and upon return. We will deliberately and methodically re-establish MEDCoE training bubbles through focused efforts while ensuring accurate information flow to the lowest level to protect our force, and in turn protect our mission. We have painstakingly developed comprehensive mitigation measures to ensure a safe reintegration from leave. 100% of returning Soldiers and cadre will be screened for signs and symptoms of illness/COVID-19. The unvaccinated and symptomatic Soldiers will also be tested for COVID-19.

### **Q10: WHAT FESTIVITIES/EVENTS ARE AVAILABLE TO THE SOLDIERS WHO CHOOSE TO STAY AT THE TRAINING CENTER'S FOR HOLIDAY BLOCK LEAVE?**

**A10:** MWR and the USO are working with MEDCoE units to provide a variety of activities to maximize Soldiers rest and recuperation time while remaining on the installation. All Soldiers who remain on base will be cared for by the MEDCoE "Hold" Company: **Hold Company 24/7 Duty Numbers: 210-596-7143 or 210-241-2944 or 210-618-9326.**

### **Q11: ARE TRAINEES ALLOWED TO LEAVE THE TRAINING CENTER IF THEY TEST POSITIVE FOR COVID-19?**

**A11:** Soldiers who test positively for COVID-19 will remain either in isolation or in quarantine on JBSA. They will not travel for Holiday Block Leave. Commanders are taking proactive measures to ensure the physical and mental health of those Soldiers who will be spending their Holidays away from family and friends.

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### Q12: IS THERE A WAY THAT USAR and ARNG TRAINEES CAN GO ON HBL EVEN IF THEY DO NOT HAVE LEAVE ACCRUED?

**A12:** USAR and ARNG trainees should be in touch with their respective states/units to answer specific questions about orders and leave status. ARNG Soldiers should be on T32 orders (cut by their state) and not controlled by MEDCoE so each answer may differ by state. Depending on the course they are attending at MEDCoE, there is a USAR and ARNG Liaison point of contact they can also contact with questions while at MEDCoE. There is not an HRAP (Hometown Recruiting Assistance Program) option available for Reserve Soldiers. Soldiers that do not have enough leave can be advanced leave on DA 31 by the MEDCoE Company Commander. If Soldiers will not have enough leave to cover the advanced days they will incur a debt. If Soldiers are allowed to take advanced leave they should be counseled, and understand that they may incur debt. If the Reserve Soldiers will have enough accrued leave/ time at graduation, and they want to take leave, we recommend they get advanced leave. If Soldiers are unsure of their MEDCoE ARNG or USAR Liaison, they should contact the Battalion. MEDCoE unit contact information is available at the following link: [www.medcoe.army.mil/32d-medbde](http://www.medcoe.army.mil/32d-medbde)

### Q13: IF A COVID-19 TEST IS REQUIRED BEFORE A SOLDIER VISITS A PARTICULAR AREA ON HOLIDAY BLOCK LEAVE WILL THE ARMY PAY FOR IT?

**A13:** We test unvaccinated and/or symptomatic Soldiers. For all others, each Soldier has been made aware that the cost of COVID tests to travel during HBL may not be paid for by TRICARE and may be at the Soldiers expense. Soldiers will make arrangements for required testing with their unit/Drill Sergeants in advance of travel. Check the current list of state requirements: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/travel-planner/index.html>. See also current CDC travel advisories: [COVID-19 Travel Recommendations by Destination | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/travel/recommendations/). In order to accomplish HBL safely, it will take open and honest self-assessments, discipline, testing when required and engaged leaders. We also require family support. Getting Soldiers home safely is our priority, ensuring everyone is adhering to COVID precautions and keeping their bubble small when they are on HBL will be heavily dependent on the support shown by Family and close friends.

### Q14: IF SOLDIERS GET COVID WHILE ON HBL WHAT DO THEY DO?

**A14:** Despite doing all of the right things, Soldiers may contract COVID-19 while on Holiday Block Leave. Soldiers cannot get "in trouble" for getting COVID but they should self-isolate from others and must report signs & symptoms as soon as possible. **Call 911 if you are having trouble breathing or another medical emergency.** (Soldiers Only) Also report the information to your respective Staff Duty (note: the 32<sup>d</sup> Medical Brigade contact page is as follows: [www.medcoe.army.mil/32d-medbde](http://www.medcoe.army.mil/32d-medbde) . If you are a Soldier, you also inform your chain of command or drill sergeant. **HBL Hold Company 24/7 Duty Numbers: 210-596-7143 or 210-241-2944 or 210-618-9326. 32<sup>d</sup> Medical Brigade SDO: 210-221-4208/5349.**

If you are a Civilian, inform your supervisor. Please note, upon confirmation of a positive test, your chain of command/supervisor and health care provider will be in contact with the MEDCoE Force Health Protection team who will be in contact with you and inform you on the way ahead. Each Soldier is given a Holiday COVID Safety Card with this information and other lists of important phone numbers and this information is also on our Holiday Block Leave web page:

[www.medcoe.army.mil/32d-medbde](http://www.medcoe.army.mil/32d-medbde)

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### **Q15: IF SOLDIERS ARE ON HBL AND SOMEONE IN THEIR HOUSEHOLD, OR THAT THEY HAVE BEEN IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH IS CONFIRMED POSITIVE, WHAT DO THEY DO?**

**A15:** This will be the same process as in question 14. Report the close contact as soon as possible to those numbers listed above. You should also quarantine from others (in case you are also positive) and you should get a test if possible. If you receive a positive test, your chain of command and health care provider will be in contact with the MEDCoE ForceHealth Protection Team who will inform you on the way ahead. Even if you receive a negative test, you should quarantine because you cannot “test out” of quarantine as there have been cases of “false negative” tests.

### **Q16: I CANNOT FIND MY UNIT CONTACT INFORMATION:**

**A16:** All Advanced Individual Training (AIT), Basic Officer Leaders Course (BOLC), and Captains Career Course (CCC) students/trainees are assigned to the 32<sup>nd</sup> Medical Brigade. Visit their webpage for contact information and a complete list of courses for the Brigade and each medical training battalion: [www.medcoe.army.mil/32d-medbde](http://www.medcoe.army.mil/32d-medbde) During Holiday Block Leave, you may also contact the HBL Hold Company (Soldiers remaining on Fort Sam Houston) and the 32d Medical Brigade Staff Duty Office (SDO):

**\*\*\*HBL Hold Company 24/7 Duty Numbers: 210-596-7143 or 210-241-2944 or 210-618-9326**

**\*\*\*32<sup>d</sup> Medical Brigade SDO: 210-221-4208/5349**

### **Q17: What is the alcohol and tobacco policy during Holiday Block Leave?**

**A17:** Soldiers will refrain from using any illegal substances, to include non-prescribed medications and marijuana. All Soldiers will undergo a drug test upon their return. Alcohol consumption is illegal when under 21 years of age. Alcohol and tobacco use are prohibited for all Soldiers during holiday block leave (HBL) travel periods.

### **Q18: I have a long trip home, can I change clothes at the airport on my layover before I reach my final destination?**

**A18:** All Soldiers must remain in uniform and in masks while traveling to and from HBL in all modes of travel. It is imperative that you present yourself as a well-disciplined, professional Soldier and live the Army values.