

## DEFENSE

### Sailors keep testing positive on aircraft carrier, despite 2-week isolation

The move potentially delays the ship's departure amid new questions about the spread of Covid-19.



U.S. Navy via AP Photo

By **LARA SELIGMAN**

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The Navy is delaying plans to begin moving sailors back onboard the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt after crew members continued to test positive for the coronavirus after isolation, according to Navy officials.

Navy leadership is temporarily halting post-quarantine testing and is extending sailors' isolation more than three weeks after the Roosevelt was forced to dock in Guam on March 27, according to a memo viewed by POLITICO.

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The move potentially delays the ship's departure amid new questions about the spread of Covid-19.

Navy leadership took the steps after a number of sailors tested positive for the novel coronavirus even after their 14-day isolation period, three crew members told POLITICO. Some of the sailors who recently tested positive had previously tested negative, one Navy official said.

"Results of out-testing portions of the TR crew following 14 days of quarantine leads us to reevaluate our assessment of how the virus can remain active in an asymptomatic host," according to a Navy directive sent to the crew and viewed by POLITICO.

"While further assessment is made regarding test-out procedures, I am directing a halt to all crew out-testing and holding any release from isolation and quarantine," the message read.

The Navy had planned to begin returning the crew to a coronavirus-free ship over the next few days with the goal of getting get back underway to continue its deployment.

"The process of moving them back onto the ship was going to start Saturday — that's what's getting slowed down as they determine, hey, how do we make sure we are getting this right before we get them back on the ship?" the Navy official said.

As of Monday, the Navy had tested 94 percent of the crew for the virus, with 678 positive and 3,904 negative results. Most of the crew — 4,069 sailors — has been moved ashore and are now spread out between hotels, houses and facilities at the naval base.




But test results in recent days — after the 14-day isolation period — led the Navy to “reevaluate our assessment of how the virus can remain active in an asymptomatic host,” the directive read.

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Crew members in quarantine and isolation across the island will be held in place while the Navy decides the path forward, the message said.

“I understand that this will delay progress toward underway for deploying units,” the message read. “We must take these actions to ensure we get underway with healthy crews.”

Crew members began hearing the news through various official and nonofficial channels this week. Some sailors received the memo. Others received notes from their commanding officers. Others were unaware of the news.

"What this means for us is that we may have to remain in isolation/quarantine for a little bit longer than we originally hoped while the Navy and the medical professionals modify the testing procedures," according to a message from one of the ship's units that was viewed by POLITICO. "This is obviously not the news we want to receive right now, but it is extremely important that we get this right and don't allow an unknowingly infected person back aboard the ship and re-infect the crew.”

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