



## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) on Annual Physical Fitness Test (APFT) Changes and Elimination of Use of President's Challenge for Basic Readiness**

### **1. Why is the President's Challenge being eliminated?**

Elimination of the President's Challenge is necessary to provide more accountability to track the readiness status of officers. Currently the President's Challenge is administered by an external organization, which limits the United States Public Health Service's (USPHS) ability to retrieve data and assess overall readiness of the USPHS. Also, the President's Challenge provides documentation of physical activity but does not adequately measure one's fitness level. Currently, only 11% of officers use the President's Challenge to maintain basic readiness, so this change affects only a small number of officers.

### **2. Why are there going to be changes to the APFT?**

It is important for USPHS to maintain an APFT that is evidence-based and provides an effective way to measure fitness levels needed to support USPHS missions. The current APFT is being updated to maintain those standards and offer additional (and more flexible) options to successfully complete it.

### **3. How are the changes to the APFT being determined?**

A group of Corps officers selected specifically based on topic-specific expertise was assembled to review the current scientific evidence regarding fitness assessments, including stratification by age and gender, as well as other uniformed services standards. Recommendations are made to the Office of the Surgeon General, who will review and approve the recommended changes.

### **4. Will citations in the scientific literature that support APFT choices/components be provided to PHS officers?**

Yes, where applicable, the references utilized for the APFT standards will be made available.

### **5. What will be different about the new APFT?**

The new APFT will offer more exercise options to complete the various components. In addition, there will be increased options regarding how the APFT can be administered.

### **6. Will the new standards be more difficult to meet than our old standards?**

The expert panel is currently reviewing the standards to ensure they are based on the most current scientific evidence. There is a possibility that some standards may be less challenging and some standards may be more challenging than the current APFT.

### **7. How can I prepare for the new standards when I don't know what they are?**

The new APFT will not take effect until 1 July 2015. There will be ample time to prepare for the APFT in advance of the 1 July 2015 implementation. Any activities that officers are currently doing to meet the existing APFT will be beneficial to training for the new APFT. Current APFT activities, i.e., run/swim, push-up, side-bridge/sit-up, will continue to be offered in the new APFT.

**8. Will the APFT be increased in frequency? (e.g. twice a year)**

No, the frequency of the APFT will not change. Each officer will be required to complete one APFT every 12 months to meet basic readiness requirements each year.

**9. When will the new APFT standards be announced?**

More information about the changes will be made available as soon as possible and information will be communicated via email, website, social media, PAC presentations, etc. The new APFT standards will be announced with sufficient time to prepare for implementation of the new APFT on 1 July 2015. If you can do the current APFT, you are assured that you will be able to do the same APFT exercises since the new APFT will add additional exercise choices and administration options to the existing APFT.

**10. Once the new standards are announced, can officers start using them immediately?**

The new APFT will take effect on 1 July 2015. Officers should continue to use the current APFT (or the President's Challenge if needed) through 30 June 2015. Officers can train for components of the new APFT prior to 1 July 2015, but will need to submit the current APFT documentation until the new APFT is in effect.

**11. What is the last day I can use the President's Challenge to meet basic readiness requirements?**

The President's Challenge will be eliminated effective 1 July 2015. You may use the President's Challenge until 30 June 2015. Effective 1 July 2015, all officers will be required to complete and pass the APFT or get a medical waiver for the components of the APFT they are unable to complete.

**12. Can officers continue using the President's Challenge on their own if desired?**

Yes, officers can continue to log their physical activity using the President's Challenge website for personal tracking and motivation. We certainly encourage a healthy lifestyle and use of the President's Challenge to monitor your health and physical activities. However, the President's Challenge will no longer be used as the physical fitness component of basic readiness.

**13. How are measurements of fitness (APFT) and physical activity (President's Challenge) different?**

The 2008 *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* definition of fitness includes cardiorespiratory fitness, muscular strength and endurance, body composition, flexibility, and balance. Physical activity is defined as any bodily movement produced by the contraction of skeletal muscle that increases energy expenditure above a basal level. The President's Challenge provides documentation of physical activity but does not measure one's fitness level. Conversely, the APFT measures fitness, through cardiovascular and muscle strength and endurance exercises. It is important for the Corps to maintain an APFT that is evidence-based and provides an effective way to measure fitness levels needed to support Corps missions.

**14. If I serve in an isolated location and do not have another officer to proctor my test, how will I be able to complete the APFT?**

With the implementation of the new APFT, there will be options to completing the APFT without having another officer physically present. Additional information will be provided with the release of the new APFT.

**15. Will the USPHS offer assistance to prepare officers to successfully complete the APFT?**

Officers are encouraged to review information at <http://ccrf.hhs.gov/ccrf/physical.htm> to understand what the APFT components are, how to perform them correctly, and how they will be evaluated. At the present time, the Corps does not have the resources to implement a program to assist officers to successfully complete the APFT. However, individual categories or local Commissioned Officers Association branches may have informal programs that could be helpful. One example is a website developed by the PharmPAC to help officers transition to the APFT as part of the APFT Initiative/PACE program:

<https://sites.google.com/site/usphspharmacyreadiness/home/apft-fitness-resources>

**16. Can we expect greater accountability and feedback on physical readiness?**

One of the reasons it is necessary to eliminate the President's Challenge is that there is no assured accountability since the President's Challenge is managed by an external organization. This limits the Corps' ability to retrieve data and assess the overall readiness of officers efficiently and effectively. With all officers utilizing the APFT, there will be a greater accountability and potential database to query for basic readiness statistics within the Corps.

**17. How are medical waivers obtained?**

Waivers will be specific to the individual components of the APFT that an officer is unable to perform. Officers are expected to complete the other components of the APFT once the waiver is in place. For example, an officer may be unable to run because of an injury, but can still complete the push-up and sit-up portions of the APFT. In this case, the waiver would exempt the officer from having to do the run portion of the fitness test.

The steps to request a medical waiver are as follows:

1. Submit medical documentation from your attending health care provider to Medical Affairs (MA) for review and determination as to whether one or more waivers should be granted. The information can be submitted to MA by mail, sending it to the attention of the Medical Reviewing Official (MRO). You can also fax your information to the MA MRO using fax # (301) 427-3434. If you have an inquiry or require assistance, you can email Dr. Alvin Abrams at [Alvin.Abrams@hhs.gov](mailto:Alvin.Abrams@hhs.gov) or Dr. Melvin Williams at [Melvin.Williams@hhs.gov](mailto:Melvin.Williams@hhs.gov) for guidance and support.
2. Upon receipt of a request for medical waiver consideration, the MRO will determine whether to:
  - Deny the request for medical waiver;
  - Grant a time-limited waiver and if so, what components of physical readiness the officer is exempted from and the duration of the medical waiver period; or
  - Grant a permanent medical waiver and if so, what aspects of physical readiness the officer is exempted from and any follow-up evaluations necessary.

To view MA's contact information, please visit <http://ccmis.usphs.gov/ccmis/MAB.aspx> to obtain a complete listing.

**18. What documentation is required to obtain a waiver for a medical limitation?**

In order to request a medical waiver, the officer must send in a brief written narrative summarizing the purpose and timeframe of the request. Additionally, the treating provider should submit a diagnosis, recommended waiver period and any additional relevant medical evidence supporting the request.

**19. Can medical waivers be permanent?**

There are two types of waivers:

1. *Permanent medical waivers*: may be granted for conditions that are unlikely to improve in the foreseeable future and are supported by medical documentation. Permanent medical waivers may be amended at any time if clinically indicated, and will automatically be reviewed at the time of an officer's periodic medical examination. Officers should view permanent medical waivers as 'long term' and not 'permanent' as they will be reviewed at least once every 5 years by a Medical Reviewing Official and extended only upon concurrence by a MAB Medical Reviewing Official.
2. *Time-limited medical waivers*: may be granted for documented health conditions that are likely to improve within 12 months, or less, from the date that the request was received. A time-limited waiver may be extended beyond 12 months for the same condition upon which the original waiver was granted following reassessment and approval by a Medical Reviewing Official. Temporary medical waivers must specify an expiration date. If no date is specified, the profile will automatically expire at the end of the third month.

**20. If I am unable to complete the APFT and do not have a waiver, what will be the consequences?**

If an officer does not complete the APFT and does not have a waiver, the officer will not be considered basic ready and will not be compliant with conditions of service. Officers that are non-compliant with conditions of service are not eligible for promotion or deployment and are subject to disciplinary actions including referral to retention boards. Once again, the vast majority of our Corps utilizes the current APFT. The projection is that these changes will only affect a very small percentage of officers. However, the changes should benefit any officer that chooses to try additional options.

These Questions and Answers above will be available on the CCMIS website (<http://dcp.psc.gov/ccmis/>) and updated as needed.