

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The Department of Defense and United States Navy have unique capabilities and surge capabilities that can be brought to help with the fight against the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) virus. Our priorities are clear...1) protect our force and their families, 2) protect our readiness to defend the homelands and 3) support our interagency partners in addressing the crisis.

We are committed to providing defense support to civil authorities by increasing medical capacity and collaboration for medical assistance and disaster relief in the two areas of our country that have seen tremendous impact from the COVID-19 pandemic.

USNS Comfort is an example of Americans helping Americans – we are your Navy, and in time of crisis, we stand ready to answer the call to support civil authorities (FEMA, Government of NY) and the American people.

As military men and women, we prepare daily to deal with adversity, uncertainty and conflict. Our Sailors and their families are resilient and will set an example for their friends, neighbors and local communities on how to make personal sacrifices in service of the collective good.

USNS COMFORT:

- The USNS Comfort hospital ship will be ready on arrival to support state and local agencies' efforts to protect the health of the American people, in the whole-of-government approach directed by the President of the United States.
- Comfort brings with her a team of medical professionals, medical equipment and supplies to provide a spectrum of medical care to include critical and urgent care for adults. They will help take the pressure off local civilian hospitals so they can focus on COVID-19 cases.
- Comfort is not deploying to treat COVID-19 patients, as it is not configured to provide treatment for infectious diseases. The primary mission is to assist with treatment of other patients in coastal locations and to enable local health professionals to better focus on a large number of COVID-19 cases.
- The ship is, in essence, a “relief valve” for the local civilian hospitals so that local health professionals can better focus on COVID-19 cases. By providing care to patients in need of treatment not related to COVID-19, we can increase the local civilian hospitals' capacity to focus on the treatment of their COVID-19 patients.
- The ship will work closely with local health officials to decide which cases are sent to USNS Comfort. These decisions will be based on the capabilities of USNS Comfort medical teams and the local officials' determination of patient priority.
- The ship can maintain up to 5,000 units of blood and has a 1,000-bed capacity. The ship is equipped with four X-ray machines, one CAT scan unit, a dental suite, an optometry and lens

laboratory, physical therapy center, pharmacy, angiography suite and two oxygen-producing plants.

- We are taking proactive measures to ensure that patients coming aboard is properly screened for COVID-19. The ship operates as an afloat hospital and has infection control procedures that will be followed, just as any hospital ashore.
- USNS Comfort medical professionals will work to reduce possible infection to ensure the safety of our patients and providers alike.
- The Navy maintains stringent cleanliness standards aboard U.S. Navy ships to support crew health and well-being. Navy leadership is closely monitoring the outbreak. The Navy will follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance for healthcare providers to mitigate the potential of any outbreak aboard USNS Comfort while providing increased medical capacities.
- Crew members, medical staff and potential patients will be screened for COVID-19 and tested as necessary to minimize the risk of any outbreak aboard USNS Comfort.

COMFORT-SPECIFIC:

- We expect Comfort to arrive in New York City Monday morning, March 29, 2020, after conducting some necessary operations at sea. The length of their deployment will be determined in coordination with local authorities and their assessment of the continued need for support.
- Comfort deployed with nearly 1,200 medical personnel and civilian mariners. No additional personnel will join once the ship arrives in NYC.
- The ship is stocked with adequate supplies to begin the mission. Comfort will be ready on arrival and will coordinate transfers with local hospitals as early as possible with careful consideration to the safety and security of patients and care providers.

Questions and Answers:

Q: Did Comfort have everything and everyone it needed when they left Norfolk?

A: Yes. The ship is stocked with adequate supplies to begin the mission.

Q. We heard Comfort was in maintenance. What did it take to get her ready to leave Norfolk so quickly?

A. Amazing teamwork. USNS Comfort has been in a pier side Mid-Term Availability (MTA) since Dec. 5, 2019, and expedited maintenance to ensure she was ready to answer the call to support civil authorities (FEMA, Government of NY) and the American people. The ship's civil service mariner crew, along with our industry partners, were provided outstanding support by the U.S. Coast Guard. All in all, it was a great team success.

Q. When will Comfort begin embarking patients?

A. Comfort will be ready on arrival and will coordinate transfers with local hospitals as early as

possible with careful consideration to the safety and security of patients and care providers. Medical planners are working with state, federal and local partners to establish the means by which we coordinate care.

Q: How were the locations for the hospital ships selected to deploy/support?

A: As the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) director Peter T. Gaynor stated, FEMA selected the locations based on analysis for the potential need for hospital beds on each coast, and where the ships would have the greatest impact.

Q: How long will USNS Comfort remain in the supported area?

A: The ship will stay as long as local officials consider their presence to be of value. The USNS Comfort's mission is not to treat COVID-19 patients aboard, but to help the local health care system by treating other patients who do not suffer from COVID-19.

Q: How long can the ship operate without resupply?

A: The ship will operate pier side and will resupply using in-port procedures with mitigations in place to ensure the safe on load of supplies.

Q: What is the projected cost of this deployment?

A: The projected budget has not been determined yet.

Q: Will there be an opportunity for media to embark USNS Comfort?

A: In an effort to protect the crew and patients, no media will allowed to walk onboard the ship. The assigned Public Affairs staff are eager and able to support video and telephonic interviews with ship leadership and crew.

MANNING

Q: Are the doctors and crew aboard USNS Comfort permanently assigned to the ship?

A: No. Our hospital ships do not maintain a full crew or medical staff. Care providers will be coming from various Navy medical facilities across the country, as well as carefully selected reservists.

Q: Where did medical staffs come from to support USNS Comfort?

A: The physicians, nurses and other medical support personnel are being drawn from Navy Medicine professionals at military treatment facilities across the country. Available reservists will also fill some of the medical positions aboard. The Defense Health Agency, as the administrator of these military treatment facilities, will work to reduce the impact of the movement of these active duty medical professionals to the ship. Local medical commanders from their home units are working to minimize the impact to patient care. We appreciate the shared sacrifice and inconvenience of everyone affected as we work with national authorities to position medical resources where they are most needed.

Q: Will bringing in Navy reservists who are medical professionals negatively impact their own communities?

A: We have worked to ensure our volunteer reservists are available to support the medical relief efforts, while also minimizing the impact to their local communities. When the Navy Reserve

was asked to help find medical professionals to help support this mission, Commander, Navy Reserve Force received more than 200 volunteer requests from our reserve medical community to help support both the active duty medical community. The specialized skillsets that our Navy reservists possess make us an indispensable force multiplier in support of this critical mission. Each volunteer reservist was screened and asked directly whether or not they could help without hurting their local community. If there was no impact and they were still willing to help, we gave them orders.

Q: Will any of the Sailors or civilian crew members from the hospital ships be allowed liberty in the local communities?

A: In order to mitigate the risk of the virus being brought aboard, liberty will not be authorized for military or civilians aboard USNS Comfort.

COVID-19 SCREENING

Q. Does the ship have the capacity to test for COVID-19?

A. Yes, the ship has the capacity to test for COVID-19.

Q. Will crew members and medical staff be tested for COVID-19 prior to embarking the ship?

A. All crew members supporting this mission have undergone two screening processes, the same used by medical professionals across the country – one before departing their home of record and one before boarding USNS Comfort. The screening consists of a temperature check and health questionnaire. Based on that screening, crew members and medical staff will be screened for COVID-19 in order to minimize the risk of an outbreak aboard USNS Comfort.

Q: How will crew members and medical staff protect themselves from contracting COVID-19 once onboard?

A: The hospital ship operates as a hospital and has infection control procedures that will be followed, just as any hospital ashore. The ship is equipped with appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) as required. Additionally, all personnel aboard Comfort will practice preventative hygiene measures recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Q. What is the screening process for crew members embarking aboard USNS Comfort?

A. Crew members and medical staff are screened using the same process that medical professionals across the country are using, which is a series of questions addressing the member's recent health and contact history.

Q. Does Comfort have access to adequate personal protective equipment (PPE), and how much is required?

A. The ship has personal protective equipment (PPE) in the form of facemasks and shields, protective suites, gloves, boot covers, etc. We have supplied the ship to meet this mission with the expectation that there will be a high turnover rate. We also expect our capability to expand as more medical professionals arrive in New York City.

Q: Are patients able to be tested for COVID-19 on USNS Comfort?

A: USNS Comfort will embark non-COVID-19 patients who were already being cared for in local area hospitals in an effort to free up facilities for COVID-19-related cases ashore. Proper screening and mitigations measures are in place to limit the risk of COVID-19, including a means to test for the virus.

Q: If a patient begins to show symptoms after they have been admitted, will the Comfort staff test patients for COVID-19 or transfer them to a local hospital?

A: The hospital ships have infection control procedures that will be followed, just as any civilian hospital ashore.

NEW YORK CITY

Q: Where is the ship going to moor?

A: USNS Comfort will be moored at Pier 90N in Manhattan at the Manhattan Cruise Terminal.

Q: Did the pier at the Manhattan Cruise Terminal need to be dredged to support the ship?

A: Yes, Pier 90N had to be dredged to support USNS Comfort.

Q: Who paid for the dredging?

A: The city will pay the expenses for dredging in conjunction with this initiative.

Q. Will USNS Comfort take walk-in patients?

A: No. The hospital ship will work with local health officials to accept non-COVID-19 patient transfers from local area hospitals. We are, in essence, a “relief valve” for the local civilian hospitals in coastal locations so that local health professionals can better focus on COVID-19 cases. By providing care to patients in need of treatment not related to COVID-19, we increase the local civilian hospitals’ capacity to focus on the treatment of their COVID-19 patients.

Q: If I am seen on the ship, how do I pay for services? Will they take my insurance card?

A: There are no anticipated costs to patients treated on the ship. The care we provide in the United States is similar to the care we provide around the world when we conduct humanitarian and disaster relief missions. The President declared COVID-19 a National Emergency. The deployment of America’s hospital ships is an investment in health and wellness for America’s people.

Q: How will patients be selected to receive medical care aboard the Navy hospital ships? And how will they be prioritized?

A: Local health officials will identify candidates for transfer to USNS Comfort after the patients have been screened for COVID-19. Doctors aboard USNS Comfort will then work directly with the patients’ civilian doctor to ensure a safe and thorough turn over before the patients are transferred to the ship. The hospital ships will serve as a relief valve for civilian hospitals by reducing their non-COVID-19 workload. The ship’s medical staff will work with local health authorities to use the hospital ship referral centers, essentially functioning as a tertiary care center for the location. Local health officials will decide on the required care, and then prioritize based on capabilities and where they need the most support.

Q: Will the Navy bill patients and insurance providers for the medical care they receive aboard the ship?

A: The President, our Commander-in-Chief, declared COVID-19 a National Emergency. The deployment of America's hospital ships is an investment in health and wellness of our people. This mission also contributes to the readiness and training of our force. For individuals treated aboard hospital ships, there is no anticipated cost. It is similar to the care the ship provides around the world when humanitarian and disaster relief missions are conducted. It is important to understand that the value of care we are providing cannot be measured in dollars alone. This is an investment made to ensure we are prepared when a future disaster strikes.

Q: If I am referred to be seen by a doctor on the ship, what do I need to bring with me?

A: For patients referred to USNS Comfort, your care provider will let you know what you will need to bring. Physicians aboard USNS Comfort will work directly with the patients' civilian physician to ensure a safe and thorough turn over before the patient is transferred to the ship.

Q: My child is home from school, can I bring him/her?

A: No, the ship is not equipped to support non-patient children. In order to mitigate the risk of the COVID-19 virus from being brought aboard USNS Comfort, and to maintain a sterile environment, patients may not to bring minors aboard the ship at any time.

Q: Can I bring my support/service animal on the ship while being treated?

A: No, in order to mitigate the risk of the COVID-19 virus from being brought aboard USNS Comfort, and to maintain a sterile environment aboard the ship, patients will not be allowed to bring support/service animals aboard on the ship.

Q: Will USNS Comfort treat patients from New Jersey?

A: At the present time, coordination with U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in New York City is determining how patients will be first identified and then transferred from area hospitals to the ship. Prior to patient transfer, both civilian physicians and USNS Comfort physicians will develop a patient care plan. All patients will be screened for COVID-19 before transferring to the ship. The hospital ships will relieve civilian hospitals by reducing their non-COVID-19 workload.

Q: How do I get to the ship? Is there parking?

A: If your doctor refers you to the ship, you will receive specific instructions on how to get to the ship. There is no parking available at the pier for patients.

Q: Are New York City ambulances bringing injured/sick people to USNS Comfort?

A: We cannot comment on whether New York City ambulances will bring injured/sick people to USNS Comfort. At the present time, coordination with U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in New York City is determining how patients will be first identified and then transferred from area hospitals to the ship. Prior to patient transfer, both civilian physicians and USNS Comfort physicians will develop a patient care plan. All patients will be screened for COVID-19 before transferring to the ship. The hospital ships will relieve civilian hospitals by reducing their non-COVID-19 workload.

Q: Will USNS Comfort keep patients overnight if needed?

A: Yes, some patients may require an overnight or longer stay, which will be determined by ship physicians in coordination with the patients' physician. The ship will be able to accommodate up to 1,000 patients at any given time.

Q: Will there be visiting hours for patients being treated on the ship?

A: Visitor policy, to include hours and visitation by clergy, is currently being determined; however, minors will not be allowed aboard the ship at any time. In order to mitigate the risk of the COVID-19 virus, and to maintain a sterile environment aboard the ship, the ship will adhere to all Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines to mitigate the spread of the virus.

Q: Will civilian clergy be allowed to visit patients being treated on the ship?

A: Visitor policy, to include hours and visitation by clergy, is currently being determined; however, minors will not be allowed aboard the ship at any time. In order to mitigate the risk of the COVID-19 virus, and to maintain a sterile environment aboard the ship, the ship will adhere to all Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines to mitigate the spread of the virus. The ship has a military chaplain aboard to support the religious needs of patients.

Q: Will kosher or halal meals be available on the ship for patients?

A: Yes, the ship is equipped to provide meals to individuals who have religious meal requirements.

Q: My regular physician is licensed in New York. Are the medical personnel on USNS Comfort also licensed to practice in New York?

A: Our qualified care providers are licensed to practice on this DOD ship in New York. They will be coming from various Navy medical facilities across the country, as well as reservists with medical backgrounds.

Q: I heard reports that the Comfort is only for military or veterans. Is that correct?

A: No, USNS Comfort will be giving care to patients from the local community in coordination with U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in New York City. At the present time, HHS is determining how patients will be first identified and then transferred from area hospitals to the ship. Prior to patient transfer, both civilian physicians and USNS Comfort physicians will develop a patient care plan. All patients will be screened for COVID-19 before transferring to the ship. The hospital ships will relieve civilian hospitals by reducing their non-COVID-19 workload.

Q: What happens if someone dies onboard? Is there a morgue? Is there a federal coroner or will a state or city coroner be in charge?

A: Just like our civilian counterparts, our medical professionals onboard USNS Comfort will adhere to the same medical requirements. Yes, the hospital ship is equipped with a morgue. The ship will work closely with the state coroner in the event someone dies while onboard.

Q: What types of procedures will/can be performed aboard the Comfort?

A: USNS Comfort will provide added medical capacity to New York hospitals for the treatment of non-COVID-19 patients. The hospital ship has a full spectrum of surgical and medical services, including: 12 operating rooms, four X-rays, one CAT scan unit, a dental suite, an optometry and lens laboratory, a physical therapy center, a pharmacy, an invasive angiography suite and two oxygen-producing plants. Comfort also maintains up to 5,000 units of blood and has 1,000 beds. Patients are assessed for various medical treatments and whether surgery is deemed necessary. During Operation Noble Eagle, in response to the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, USNS Comfort was pier side in Manhattan where the ship's crew provided meals, housing, medical and psychological services to volunteer and relief workers at ground zero from Sept. 14 - Oct. 1, 2001.

Q: Will the ship deliver babies?

A: No, the ship will not be delivering babies aboard. Currently the ship is not equipped with an OBGYN Birth Center; however, each patient will be accessed upon need on a case-by-case basis. At the present time, coordination with U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in New York City is determining how patients will be first identified and then transferred from area hospitals to the ship. Prior to patient transfer, both civilian physicians and USNS Comfort physicians will develop a patient care plan. The ship's operating rooms contain the same contemporary equipment used in shore-based hospitals.

Q: Will patients have private rooms? If not, can I pay extra to get a private room?

A: No, the hospital ship has an open-bay design configuration and with 1,000 available beds. Patients cannot pay to get a special or private rooms.

Q: Who requested for the ship to come to New York City?

A: New York Governor Andrew Cuomo requested President Donald Trump to provide relief for the ongoing medical demands in the state of New York. Defense Secretary Mark Esper ordered the Navy to "lean forward" to deploy the ship to the state.

Q: Why didn't the ship go to Brooklyn or Staten Island instead?

A: The ship will be moored at Pier 90N in Manhattan, which can better support the needs and requirements of the ship.

Q: Will the ship treat cancer patients?

A: No. Each patient will be accessed upon need on a case-by-case basis. At the present time, coordination with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in New York City is determining how patients will be first identified and then transferred from area hospitals to the ship. Prior to patient transfer, both civilian physicians and USNS Comfort physicians will develop a patient care plan. The ship's operating rooms contain the same contemporary equipment used in shore-based hospitals.