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## **PRESS RELEASE: EDITORIAL Fort Benning Takes “Kung-Fu” Stance To Fight Surge In COVID-19 Cases.**

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**FORT BENNING, Ga.** – “We knew this was coming.” Maj. Gen Patrick J. Donahoe, Commanding General Maneuver Center of Excellence and Fort Benning told a group of leaders as they discussed the massive surge in COVID-19 cases. “We made the right preparations, we just need to make sure we are all adhering to them accordingly.”

### **General Order #7**

(Effective Monday, January 4th at 12:01am)

**Purpose: To mitigate the spread of COVID following the Holiday period.**

#### **Not-Permitted**

- Travel outside of 50-mile radius from FBGA
- Entry into any off-post restaurants
- Bars and off-post gyms
- Social gatherings with more than 15-people

#### **Permitted**

- Travel within 50-mile radius from FBGA (but limit as much as possible)
- Restaurants with drive-thrus or offering curbside pick-up
- Social gatherings with **LESS THAN 15-people**, adhering to social distancing guidelines

- Avoiding entry into any public facilities, to include grocery stores, is encouraged. Use curbside pickup if available!
- Organizations are encouraged to tele-work as much as possible during the ROM period
- Use of masks are still required at on-post facilities unless you are at your immediate personal work-station
- DODEA schools will operate virtually during this period, and as long as FBGA remains at HPCON-C
- **This applies to all personnel assigned to, employed by, living or, or otherwise accessing Fort Benning**
- If and when at all possible...**STAY HOME!!!**

Information graphic covering details of Fort Benning and MCoE’s General Order #7.

The preparations Donahoe referred to are summed up in General Order #7. General orders are executive-level orders produced to provide requirements for duty during a certain period or assignment. These orders are normally used during wartime periods to let Soldiers know what is expected of them while they are deployed, and what they can and cannot do. In response to the pandemic, many Army installations have been using them to inform their Soldiers, civilian employees, and their family members of the current situation and what measures are being put in place to mitigate the spread of the virus. General Order #7 was actually produced prior to the holidays, but did not go into effect until Jan. 4, when Soldiers returned. Though the surge was expected, and was already somewhat underway following Thanksgiving, Donahoe

stayed committed to sending Soldiers home for what he called a much-needed and well-deserved break, just as he communicated to them during a Facebook Live town hall meeting back in August. Due to the pandemic, stress placed on instructors and other permanent-party personnel on Fort Benning increased exponentially. Cadre have been spread thin as Fort Benning established internal quarantine and isolation facilities and staffs. All courses emplaced additional instructor responsibilities to reduce the possibility of an outbreak among student populations. Also, many courses operate 7-days a week, relying on breaks between courses to allow cadre to recuperate and spend more time with their Families. Now however, those breaks are now filled with caring for quarantined and isolated Soldiers who arrive early or stay late to prevent spreading the virus on Fort Benning, or carrying it to another installation.

In the period leading up to the holidays, the Fort Benning team developed plans to allow more than 10,000 Soldiers to depart the area and return safely. Much analysis was put into General Order #7, which emplaced a 2-week restriction of movement (ROM) period on those assigned to, employed by, or living on Fort Benning beginning Jan. 4. This is designed to be a sort-of installation-level quarantine, and while many essential activities like grocery shopping, getting gas in vehicles, and doing laundry are still permitted, all personnel are encouraged to use curbside services whenever available, and avoid entry into public locations whenever it is possible to do so. Other prohibitions include travel outside of 50-miles from Fort Benning, entry into any off-post restaurants, entry into bars and off-post gyms, and social gatherings with more than 15 people.



Data for chart source from the Georgia Dept of Public Health Daily Status Report and Alabama COVID-19 Data and Surveillance Dashboard. Information as of 1/5/2021

Though the surge in COVID-19 cases is already underway, it is expected to get worse over the next week as the virus's incubation period expires and more infected personnel are identified. The chart is used by Fort Benning to track

COVID-19 cases in the surrounding areas. This local case-rate is the primary driver of policies, and general orders are the medium by which those policies are enacted. As shown on the chart, general orders have been

modified throughout the pandemic based on continuous assessments of the situation. These policies, combined with measures taken by local community leaders (e.g. the Columbus Mayor's mask mandate) have clearly worked in the past, and led to reductions in many restrictions previously put in place. Again, as shown on the chart the post-holiday surge is already proving to be the worse than all previous, and in response, General Order #7 enacts strict policies to mitigate the spread of the virus as much as possible. It may only get worse, but it too will pass. How long it takes however, depends on everyone's individual actions and decisions.

On the brighter side of this story, as of Jan. 2, COVID-19 vaccinations are officially underway on Fort Benning, as they are in the surrounding communities. The installation is following the same tiered vaccination plans as the rest of the nation, starting with medical personnel and first responders, then moving to those at highest risk of severe complications due to age, pre-existing conditions, or other health-related factors. As of Jan. 6, more than 650 personnel received their vaccinations on Fort Benning, and as the installation receives more doses they will ramp up distribution as much as possible.

With the holidays over and vaccinations underway, Donahoe says it is time to hunker down. "We are on our way to beating this, but we're not there yet. Now is the time we need to get in our Kung-Fu stance and defend our post from the virus. Just this week we lost another one of our civilian team-mates to the virus. This is still a very serious issue." He is urging everyone to adhere to General Order #7, Soldiers, civilian employees and family members alike. Not adhering to policies contained in general orders may result in punitive actions for Soldiers. [More than 60 Soldiers assigned to Fort Benning have been punished for violating previous General Orders](#). While civilian employees, family members, or others with access to Fort Benning may not be subject to official military punishments, they can be barred from accessing post, or have other installation-related benefits revoked. Fort Benning has actively communicated these consequences on [social media](#) in a campaign to reinforce the gravity of the situation and the need for everyone to work together and maintain their own personal discipline.

2021 may be off to a turbulent start on Fort Benning, but the mission must go on. Starting Jan. 4, One-Station-Unit-Training (also known as basic training) and Officer Candidate School have resumed in-person training,

simply because there is no other way to conduct that specific training virtually since it requires trainees to live together on post. However, they are adhering to strict mitigation measures, and are monitoring all Soldiers closely for any symptoms of COVID-19. Soldiers at Fort Benning for Ranger training are being quarantined for 14-days before resuming training due to the intensity of the course and proximity they must maintain to each other during training. All other training on Fort Benning is either being conducted virtually, or has been delayed until after the ROM period.

Though Fort Benning's mission and the transient-nature of the post present unique challenges, its organizations successfully adapted to continue their missions before, and recovering from the holiday period will be no different. It will take time, and it will take everyone being responsible for their part. Do your part, adhere to policies, wear your mask, wash your hands, and whenever possible...STAY HOME!!

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