

USPHS COMMISSIONED CORPS READY RESERVE CORPS

What is the USPHS Commissioned Corps?

The U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps is a team of more than 6,500 full-time officers dedicated to promoting and advancing public health and disease prevention programs. As one of America's seven uniformed services, the Commissioned Corps fills essential public health leadership and service roles within the Nation's Federal Government agencies and programs.

Commissioned Corps officers can serve as physicians, nurses, pharmacists, dentists, dietitians, engineers, environmental health officers, health service officers, scientists, therapists, and veterinarians. In addition to their regular duties such as providing patient care to underserved populations or conducting biomedical research, Commissioned Corps officers respond to public health crises, natural disasters, disease outbreaks, and terrorist attacks and also serve on humanitarian assistance missions. Over the last few years, Commissioned Corps officers have provided leadership and humanitarian health services during several natural disasters, such as the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, and in 2008, Hurricanes Ike and Gustav. They have also provided support during the 2001 anthrax attacks and after the attack on the World Trade Center.

The Assistant Secretary for Health (ASH) oversees the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, providing it with strategic and policy direction, while the Surgeon General, through the Office of the Surgeon General, oversees its operations. Although a uniformed service, Commissioned Corps officers are not members of the U.S. armed forces.

To learn more about the USPHS Commissioned Corps, visit www.usphs.gov.

Why did the new health care bill create a Ready Reserve Corps?

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, enacted March 23, 2010, created the Ready Reserve Corps, a new component of the USPHS Commissioned Corps.

The purpose of the Ready Reserve Corps is to have additional Commissioned Corps personnel available on short notice (similar to the other uniformed services' reserve programs) to assist Regular Commissioned Corps personnel to meet both routine public health and emergency response missions. Prior to the passage of the new law, the USPHS Commissioned Corps did not have a reserve component to call upon in this fashion. The Ready Reserve Corps members perform duties for assigned periods of time as opposed to full time Regular Corps members who are on extended active duty. Joining the Ready Reserve Corps is voluntary; however, members of the Ready Reserve Corps join knowing that they can be called at anytime to serve in times of national need.

The Ready Reserve Corps officers will participate in routine training; be available and ready for calls to active duty during national emergencies and public health crises or to backfill critical positions left vacant during deployment of Regular Corps

members; or be available for service assignments in isolated, hardship and medically underserved communities.

How is the Ready Reserve Different from the former Reserve Corps?

The former Reserve Corps officers served side-by-side with Regular Officers on full-time extended active duty to meet public health needs of various agencies both within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and other federal agencies such as the Bureau of Prisons and the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The law eliminates the Reserve Corps by extending Regular Corps status to Commissioned Corps officers already serving in a full-time capacity. Moving forward, all officers called to extended active duty will enter the Regular Corps.

Where can I go to find out more information about the Ready Reserve Corps?

HHS is in the process of reviewing that provision of the legislation. The USPHS Web site will be updated with information on the Ready Reserve Corps as it becomes available.