Press Release

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Fort Drum Public Affairs

Fort Drum commanders continue post’s COVID-19 prevention and mitigation response to include face covering, barber shop closures

Fort Drum, NY - Face masks – when to wear them, how to make them and why they are required – was among the topics discussed April 9 during the weekly Fort Drum virtual town hall on the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Per Department of Defense guidance, face coverings are now required on all military installations, while in public spaces where six feet or more of physical distancing is not possible. At Fort Drum, this includes the Commissary, Post Exchange, Shoppettes and Clark Hall. This does not apply to personal homes.

Fort Drum officials announced that this requirement began April 8 for service members and it started today for everyone else on post today. Col. Jeffery Lucas, Fort Drum garrison commander, said that he was at the Commissary yesterday and saw that family members and other shoppers had already adopted the face coverings with no problems.

“Most of you were happy to have them,” he said. “I think there was a comfort in knowing that we wanted to implement face coverings in our facilities, and folks were doing it on their own and they were doing it in a warm way. Underneath the masks, I saw a lot of smiles.”

Masks can be made from materials such as clean T-shirts or other clean cloth that cover the nose and mouth. Soldiers in uniform have specified guidance as to the colors that can be worn, and no graphics or lettering is allowed. Soldiers are authorized to wear the issued neck gaiter, a bandana or scarf as face coverings. Cloth masks should be washed daily with regular laundry or soaked in the sink with hot water and detergent.

Other changes made at Fort Drum this week included the option for curbside pickup of online purchases (www.shopmyexchange.com) at the Exchange, and the establishment of a similar service at the Commissary.

“We’ve already had a number of volunteers who have asked to be personal shoppers or assist with bagging for the curbside service,” Lucas said. “A lot of those are coming from our BOSS (Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers) program, and I really appreciate those efforts.”

He also said that community members will notice hand sanitizer or hand washing stations at the gas stations and shopping areas.

“We absolutely encourage every patron to avail themselves of either the sanitizer or hand wash before they enter the facility or when using the gas pumps,” Lucas said.

The closure of PX barber shops is a step many installations across the Army have taken to minimize physical interactions. Command Sgt. Maj. Mario Terenas, 10th Mountain Division (LI) senior enlisted adviser, said that it was a necessary measure to take, but it does not mean that Soldiers should lower their standards.

“You’re going to have to come up with some solutions to keep your hair at acceptable standards,” he said. “We’re not going to go into relaxed grooming standards, as of now.”

Maj. Gen. Brian J. Mennes, 10th Mountain Division (LI) and Fort Drum commander, said that none of the 1st Brigade Combat Team Soldiers who have redeployed from Afghanistan has tested positive for COVID-19 yet, and that those who returned home in the first flight two weeks ago will be allowed out of quarantine on Friday.

Mennes also said that Soldiers from 510th Human Resources Company, 10th Mountain Division Sustainment Brigade, deployed April 8 to Fort Dix, New Jersey, to support medical and logistical support teams from the XVIII Airborne Corps.

“What I was most impressed by those Soldiers was that all of them looked forward to helping,” he said.

Mennes said that he has seen many positive examples of people supporting one another through the pandemic. One community member is collecting donations through the Girl Scouts to supply cookies to quarantined personnel; another is helping the elderly shop for groceries. He mentioned the USO volunteers who have been providing bagged lunches and other goodies to service members and their families. Today, they were distributing free face masks kits with breathable fabric and rubber bands.

At the same time, Mennes fielded questions from community members about the possibility for safely organizing children’s playdates and small gatherings for Easter. He cautioned that people should continue to practice safe physical distancing and minimize exposure to the virus. Mennes said that self-imposed isolation requires a kind of discipline that most people haven’t had to maintain for such an extreme length of time before, but this is vital to flattening the curve.

Terenas said that is why Soldiers are asked to conduct solo physical training sessions. Even when groups had started exercising together while practicing safe distancing measures, there was a natural tendency to gravitate toward one another.

“I think at the end of the day it is about keeping that bubble, and keeping ourselves in the bubble so that if there is some incident of COVID-19, that we are not cross-spreading between groups,” he said.

More than 800 people viewed the livestreamed town hall, which is available with past forums at https://www.facebook.com/drum.10thmountain/. Lucas said that community members should continue to monitor that page and the Fort Drum website (www.home.army.mil/drum) for daily updates.

“I check those as well to see what you’re saying, and I read your comments and really appreciate your feedback,” he said. “Please continue to routinely check those.”

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Media with inquiries regarding this press release should contact Fort Drum Public Affairs, Julie Halpin, julie.a.halpin2.civ@mail.mil, 315-772-8286.