



# NEWS RELEASE

## Defense Commissary Agency

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## Commissaries, support facilities designated mission-critical as part of DOD's COVID-19 response

*By DeCA Corporate Communications*

**Note:** To see photos related to this release, go to [Flickr](#). To read the release online, go to the agency [website](#).

**FORT LEE, Va. –**  
The Defense Commissary Agency's (DeCA) stores, central distribution centers and its central meat processing plant have been designated mission-critical in DOD's response to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

Virginia S. Penrod, acting assistant secretary of defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, announced the action in a memo published March 25 to the military secretaries and commanders of geographic combatant commands.

Penrod's designation reinforces the commissaries' mission as being vital to military sustainment and readiness. "Providing for the care and feeding of our military members and



*Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Florida, Commissary staff serve customers. (DeCA photo)*

families is a critical requirement that must be accomplished at all health protection condition levels,” she wrote in the memo.

Since the start of the coronavirus outbreak, DeCA has used critical hire authority to fast-track the hiring of store employees needed to help keep stores properly staffed. The memo addresses potential staff shortages by alerting the military to be “prepared to support sustainment of commissary operations with uniformed members and assets.”

Other measures spelled out in the commissaries’ mission-critical designation include the following:

- Installation commanders should ensure continued installation access for resupply trucks and commissary-related support services such as linen services and mission-critical commercial activities contractors. However, this authority excludes non-mission critical contract services and personnel such as delis, bakeries, sushi stations, flower shops and seafood stations.
- Commissary store directors can decide locally the patron purchase limits needed to ensure their stock levels meet patron demand. Exceptions to this authority can occur if installation commanders establish limits in accordance with DoDI 6200.03.
- Store directors can make operational decisions to ensure the safe and efficient operation of their commissary in areas such as operating hours, days and staffing levels. Exceptions to this authority can occur if installation commanders establish limits in accordance with DoDIs 6200.03 or 6055.17.
- DeCA can submit requests for joint force personnel or logistics support through the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to the Joint Staff.
- Installation commanders can override their commissaries’ mission-critical designation, in accordance with DOD instructions, if they determine public health and emergency management concerns are more significant.

In late February, DeCA stood up its emergency operations center to mobilize the agency’s support to its 236 stores worldwide amid the COVID-19 outbreak. Commissaries also intensified their partnership with industry suppliers to support the needs of senior leaders on the ground at each location, said Rear Adm. (ret.) Robert J. Bianchi, DOD special assistant for commissary operations.

“Being designated mission-critical further reinforces our responsibility to effectively and efficiently deliver the commissary benefit to the millions of service members and their families worldwide who need it during this outbreak,” Bianchi said. “We do this in concert with our installation commanders to decide what’s needed as far as social distancing and the hours or days

to designate in best serving our military communities.”

Bianchi emphasized that DeCA’s No. 1 objective continues to be providing the military and their families with necessary goods and ensuring commissaries remain safe and clean.

For more information about DeCA’s response to the coronavirus, go to the [commissary website](#).

## **-DeCA-**

**About DeCA:** *The Defense Commissary Agency operates a worldwide chain of commissaries providing groceries to military personnel, retirees and their families in a safe and secure shopping environment. Commissaries provide a military benefit, saving authorized patrons thousands of dollars annually on their purchases compared to similar products at commercial retailers. The discounted prices include a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones. A core military family support element, and a valued part of military pay and benefits, commissaries contribute to family readiness, enhance the quality of life for America’s military and their families, and help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve their country.*

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