



Pentagon Pauses Training of New Recruits Living With HIV

After a 2024 ruling, Americans with undetectable HIV could enlist in the Armed Services. The Pentagon may reinstate a discriminatory ban.

January 23, 2026 By [Trent Straube](#)

The Pentagon has ordered a pause on training new recruits [living with HIV](#). What's more, [military](#) leadership is considering reinstating a ban that prohibits Americans who are HIV positive from enlisting in the Armed Services altogether, [reports CNN](#). A decision is likely to come down "in the next few weeks."

Reinstating the discriminatory ban on recruits would be [counter to a 2024 district court ruling](#). In that case, *Wilkins v. Austin*, the judge ruled that Americans living with HIV who maintain an [undetectable viral load](#) can no longer be barred from enlisting.

People living with HIV who take meds and maintain an undetectable viral load do not transmit the virus, a fact referred to as Undetectable Equals Untransmittable, or U=U. What's more, for many people with the virus, HIV is a manageable chronic condition that doesn't impede their daily activity; in fact, most take one pill a day or a long-lasting injectable treatment once every two months.

Policies that prohibit their enrollment in the military "are irrational, arbitrary, and capricious. Even worse, they contribute to the ongoing stigma surrounding HIV-positive individuals while actively hampering the military's own recruitment goal," [wrote Judge Leonie Brinkema](#), of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, in that 2024 ruling.

Last month, a federal appeals court shelved the 2024 ruling but has not issued a final decision in the case, reports CNN. "While awaiting the decision, we are pausing shipping any HIV+ applicants and will follow-up in the coming weeks," stated a military email obtained by CNN.

It has not yet been reported how many trainees this will affect.

The Modern Military Association of America finds this new decision to be "both deeply concerning and counter to decades of legal progress and the needs of our national security," according to a statement by its executive director, Ashley Carothers, posted on ModernMilitary.org. The statement continues:

“In 2024, the U.S. District Court struck down the last discriminatory policy barring individuals living with HIV from enlisting in the U.S. Armed Forces in *Wilkins v. Austin*, recognizing that modern medical science has transformed HIV into a manageable condition and that asymptomatic individuals with undetectable viral loads are fully capable of serving their country.

“The Modern Military Association of America proudly stood at the forefront of that fight, advocating tirelessly to ensure that all qualified Americans, regardless of HIV status, are judged on their merit, not outdated stigma about their diagnosis.

“The reported Pentagon pause, coming amid an appellate review of the *Wilkins* ruling, risks undermining this hard-won victory. Decisions about military service eligibility must be based on sound medical evidence and a commitment to equality, not fear or prejudice. HIV is not a barrier to competent service; with today’s treatments, people who are virally suppressed are not at risk of transmitting the virus and can serve effectively alongside their peers.”

This is not the first move away from evidence-based science and toward discrimination under the Trump administration. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, CNN points out, banned transgender service members from the military.

Before the 2024 ruling, people with undetectable HIV weren’t allowed to enlist. Similarly, before 2022, service members who tested HIV positive could be discharged and denied promotions regardless of their fitness and ability to serve. [A landmark federal ruling in 2022](#) struck down such discriminatory Pentagon policies, meaning that the Department of Defense could no longer block people from becoming officers simply because of their HIV status.

To read a collection of POZ articles about HIV and service members, click [#Military](#). You’ll find articles such as:

- [“People With HIV Report Roadblock to Joining the Military, Despite Court Rulings in Their Favor,”](#)
- [“Air Force Eases Restrictions for Pilots and Air Crew on PrEP to Prevent HIV”](#) and
- [“Nick Harrison, Serviceman With HIV, Becomes a Commissioned Officer.”](#)