

The Coast Guard's National Maritime Center (NMC) Medical Evaluation Division is responsible for evaluating fitness for duty of all merchant mariners, in order to minimize safety risk to the Mariner Transportation System.

The Division is comprised of a Medical Screening Branch and a Medical Evaluation Branch. The Medical Screeners and Medical Evaluators perform medical evaluations and administrative functions to support the medical evaluation of Merchant Mariner Credential (MMC) application packages, which is essential to the success of the Coast Guard's mission of ensuring the safe operation of commercial vessels by determining whether a mariner poses any risk to maritime safety.



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**The National Maritime Center**

**Medical  
Division**

## Fitness for Duty Determinations

The determination of whether or not a mariner is fit for full duty is based on a medical evaluation of the physical examination and supporting documents submitted by the applicant. The medical evaluation is a three step process; however, not all applicants are subject to all three evaluations:

- 1) **Medical Screening:** NMC has entry level medical professionals (Certified Medical Assistants) that review every physical that arrives in the medical division. Although they have limited ability to grant waivers, they are able to process over 70% of the daily mariner files received so that they will not require further review.
- 2) **Initial Medical Review:** Any medical condition that has been deemed outside of the capability of screening staff is reviewed by a medical evaluator (licensed physicians' assistant). These medical evaluators review the physicals that require a more comprehensive review (medications, injuries, illness, significant medical histories, etc). The medical evaluators have the ability to grant waivers. They can also request amplifying information if not enough documentation has been provided to allow them to make a fitness for duty determination. They are authorized to speak with an applicant's physician when there are questions with regards to fitness for duty requirements, or requested information. Nearly 90% of initial medical reviews will result in waivers that will not require further scrutiny.

- 3) **2nd level Review:** When a physical examination has been evaluated and the medical evaluator has determined that the mariner may NOT be fit for duty, the file is submitted to our senior evaluation staff for the final determination. Less than 2% of all physicals sent for 2nd level review will be found not fit for duty.

## Medical Waivers

Medical screeners and medical evaluators will grant a medical waiver for conditions documented on Merchant Mariner Medical Examination reports when the condition has been identified as not posing a significant risk to maritime safety. The waiver is an acknowledgement by the Coast Guard that the condition was identified and places a responsibility on the mariner to immediately report any significant change in this identified condition. The requirement to report the change in condition allows the Coast Guard to determine if the condition has remained stable or has deteriorated; worsened conditions may affect a mariner's fitness for duty determination.

## Amplifying Information (AI)

Frequently, a mariner's medical examination report will indicate treatment for an illness, injury, or prescription for a medication that requires further documentation to elaborate and explain significant medical history necessary for a medical screener or evaluator to make a fitness for duty determination. Amplifying Information (AI) refers to information (medical history, current status report, diagnostic testing, etc.) requested by medical evaluation staff to obtain a more precise picture of the mariner's health and fitness. The majority (90%) of Merchant Mariner Physical Examination Forms (719K) received at the NMC are deficient of critical information

explaining noted diagnoses, conditions, or medications, thus resulting in a request for AI. (For more information on the most common deficiencies regarding physicals, visit the following website: <http://www.uscg.mil/nmc/medical/default.asp>)

## Top 10 Medical Conditions That Delay Mariner Applications

There are medical conditions that can delay the processing of a mariner's application or even cause a mariner's application to be denied. Mariners with any of the following conditions should print out the associated evaluation guideline from the National Maritime Center website (<http://www.uscg.mil/nmc/medical/default.asp>) and take it to their doctor so the condition can be addressed.

1. Cardiovascular Conditions
2. Diabetes
3. Psychiatric Disorders
4. Sleep Disorders
5. Chronic Use of Impairing Medications
6. Impaired Hearing
7. Alcohol/Drug Abuse
8. Seizures
9. Vision Requirements
10. Pulmonary Conditions

It is extremely important that mariners provide medical documentation from their doctor if they have one or more of these medical conditions. The guidelines on the NMC website will instruct the mariner and the mariner's doctor on what they should send to the NMC.

