

MEDICAL STANDARDS

1. Q: What are medical standards and who do they apply to?

A. The Federal Interagency Wildland Firefighter Medical Standards apply only to arduous duty wildland firefighting positions as described in PMS 310-1 and Forest Service Fire & Aviation Qualification Guide (FSFAQG). Specific medical standards are required because of the arduous and hazardous nature of the job.

2. Q: Are the medical standards the same as the fitness test for arduous duty known as the work capacity or pack test?

A. No. You must have a “Medically Qualified” or “Medically Qualified – Waiver” determination in eMedical, meaning you meet the Medical Standards, or you have a waiver for the applicable Medical Standard(s) not met, before you can participate in the arduous duty Work Capacity Test (pack test).

3. Q: Can I perform arduous work if I am pregnant?

A. Yes. You will be able to work for as long as your OB/GYN provides documentation that it is safe to do so. Please note that you will be required to provide routine updates about your ability to safely work from your OB/GYN during your pregnancy to the FS Reviewing Medical Officer.

ARDUOUS MEDICAL PROCESS (AMP) – Arduous Medical Exam (AME) and Self-Certification/BP Check

GENERAL

4. Q: Why are we switching from the Health Screening Questionnaire/OF-178 process to this new process?

A. The process is being changed to ensure that the personnel assigned arduous fire position duties meet the Office of Personnel Management approved Medical Standards. These Standards have been created because of the arduous and hazardous job duties these positions have. The intent of the Agency after they left the previous Medical Standards Program, in the early 2000’s, was to create a new program for all arduous duty fire positions.

5. Q: Does the new process impact Light or Moderate duty fire positions?

A. No. This new process only applies to arduous duty fire positions.

- 6. Q: Will any of the information collected as part of the Arduous Medical Program be used to track long-term occupational health data for wildland firefighters?**
- A. At this time there are no plans to use data collected by the Medical Qualifications Program for any occupational health program.
- 7. Q: How often are medical exams required (what's the periodicity)?**
- A. All arduous fire qualifications must have a medical exam every three years and self-certify in the years between exams as a condition of employment. It is acknowledged that a Work Capacity Test is valid for 13 months, and the three-year periodicity for the exam will incorporate that.
- 8. Q: How do smokejumpers fit into the new process? Are they still required to get a yearly physical?**
- A. Smoke Jumpers will now be on a three-year exam cycle once they start the AMP; they will not be required to obtain an annual physical.
- 9. Q: Does the HSQ Coordinator or my supervisor see all my personal medical information?**
- Q: Who are the people in the USFS that get to see all the personal medical information that I submit as part of the Arduous Medical Process? I'm worried about my privacy.**
- A. No, your HSQ Coordinator and supervisor cannot see your medical exam questionnaire, exam information, or attachments. Only the individuals in the Medical Qualifications Program (MQP) office, the Medical Officers and the support specialists that assist the employees through the process, are the only Agency employees that can see the exam documentation besides the firefighter.
- 10. Q: I have a question about something related to the Arduous Medical Process and it's personal and I don't want to go through my supervisor. Is there an informational contact phone number or email through which I can get my question(s) answered?**
- A. Yes. You can send questions to SM.FS.MQP_emedical@usda.gov and they will be answered by one of the MQP staff as soon as possible.
- 11. Q: Why does one person get Qualified while another doesn't, and they have the same issue?**
- A. Given the variations in which a condition may present in different individuals (i.e., severity, aerobic capacity, medications and doses, triggers), each case is reviewed independently with consideration of all the medical information

available from the examination and from the examinee's personal health care provider.

12. Q: I'd like to talk to a mental health professional about a few things, but I've heard that if I do, I'll be medically disqualified and therefore unable to work my arduous position. Should I be concerned to talk to a clinician?

Q: The Agency has recently promoted the importance of mental health, so I started seeing a mental health professional to help me work through some very personal things. Do I have to disclose this and why?

A. First, PLEASE take care of yourself. See and talk to a clinician about your mental health when needed. Other than pyromania, a mental health diagnosis is NOT an automatic disqualification. With the exception of marriage/family/relationship counseling, you need to advise the medical qualifications program of any psychiatric counseling you are receiving. Second, you will be asked to obtain information from your clinician about the diagnosis and treatment, and the stability of the condition, but the first priority is getting the help that you need to be healthy, both mind and body. Your condition will be evaluated to ensure that you are not a risk to be on the fire line performing your duties safely and efficiently, and any medications you are taking will be evaluated to determine if they place you at unacceptable risk to be on the fire line.

13. Q: Why does the Forest Service Medical Officer need this information being requested or to be notified of a change in medical condition or status or a new medication?

Q: Why does the Agency need to know what medications I'm taking? (My medications don't seem like they have anything to do with my job as a firefighter and I've already been taking them while doing this job for a while, with no issues.)

A. The FS Medical Officer is responsible for determining if a medical condition is static and stable and does not pose a danger to the employee or their co-workers. Many medical conditions may have subtle or drastic changes that can pose dangers to oneself or others in a wildfire environment. Many commonly used prescribed and over-the-counter medications and herbal supplements can increase risk for injury in the wildland fire environment that many medical providers do not think of when explaining side effect risks in the office, including rhabdomyolysis and heat injury. Additionally, the environment a firefighter operates in may impact the effectiveness of the medications they are prescribed (e.g.: heat degrades nitroglycerin). The FS Medical Officer or Medical Review Board physician is the only person that can medically qualify an employee to participate in the WCT and perform their arduous fire duties.

14. Q: If a supervisor has direct knowledge an employee is unable to meet the medical standards or physical requirements of arduous duty wildland firefighting, what do they do?

- A. If the supervisor has a reasonable concern, based on objective evidence, that an employee may no longer be able to meet the physical or medical requirements of their position, they need to contact Employee Relations and Dr. Jennifer Symonds or Matthew Webb, N.P., the MQP medical officers, to discuss the concern. The Medical Officer will request information from the supervisor and determine the appropriate next steps dependent on the specific issue at hand. The next step may be an off-schedule medical examination or supplying medical documentation from the employee's medical provider.

15. Q: Where do I find more information on the Arduous Medical Process?

- A. You can find the Arduous Medical Process Implementation Guide on the eMedical website: [eMedical | US Forest Service \(usda.gov\)](#)

AME MEDICAL HISTORY QUESTIONNAIRE

16. Q: Do I have to answer all of the questions?

- A. Employees are required to complete the medical history questions in FS-5100-41 electronically before scheduling an examination. However, if an employee is uncomfortable and/or unsure about answering questions 2, 3, 5, 6, 11, 12, 71, 83(a), 84, 85, and 86, then the employee can choose to not answer these questions and instead discuss those questions during the medical examination. For the questions that the employee is not required to answer, there will be a third option for the employee to select, which will be, "Discuss with medical provider." Thereafter, the medical provider will document in FS-5100-41, Part C, any medical concerns related to the unanswered questions.

17. Q: If I disclose that I have a medical condition, will I be disqualified?

- A. The only medical conditions that are absolute disqualifiers for an arduous fire position are uncorrectable severe to total hearing loss in conversational wavelengths in both ears, uncorrectable vision loss beyond 20/40 in both eyes, uncorrectable loss of function in both legs or arms, quadriplegia, pyromania, stage 4 or 5 chronic kidney disease (kidney failure). Each individual is looked at on a case-by-case basis regarding their medical condition, and the status and stability of said medical condition, before a determination is made whether an individual can be cleared with a waiver, with or without mitigations. For the overwhelming majority of medical

diagnoses, when they are static and stable, a qualification determination can be granted with a waiver, with or without mitigations.

The Dept. of Interior's Fire Medical Standards Program (MSP) is run a little differently than the Forest Service Fire Medical Qualifications Program (MQP). In the MSP, if one does not meet the Medical Standard, they are initially determined to be Not Qualified and then go through a waiver process. In the MQP, it is attempted to determine if waivers can be granted early in the process before an initial determination is made. If the employee does not supply the information that the Medical Officer suggests will help with this determination, then they may be determined to be Not Qualified.

18. Q: How does being colorblind affect my arduous duty status?

- A. Generally speaking, you will be given a waiver which states that you must notify your supervisor and co-workers that you are color blind, that your crew uses MTDC approved escape route markers for color blind individuals, that you remain constantly aware of the environment to recognize movement and other visual indicators of danger, and that you will verify that the flagging being used in your work area is one you are able to see.

19. Q: If I have a history of substance abuse, will that affect my medical qualification determination?

- A. Not unless your prior substance abuse has caused a disqualifying condition such as kidney failure (which is a risk with certain types of drug use).

20. Q: "I've just been diagnosed with mild hypertension, and I'm worried that disclosing this will affect my ability to be medically qualified, so I'm gonna just keep this new diagnosis to myself. This is the best thing to do, right?"

- A. First, please do not omit disclosing a medical condition as the Fire and Aviation Medical Officers are doing their best to make sure that you and your co-workers stay as safe as possible at work regarding your medical condition(s). Second, intentionally failing to disclose a medical diagnosis is lying on a government form and does have consequences, both monetary as well as legal, and could result in a disciplinary or adverse action, up to and including removal from federal service.

21. Q: After my most recent physical, the doctor told me I'm "pre-diabetic." Will this impact my ability to get medically qualified?

- A. Each individual is looked at on a case-by-case basis regarding their medical condition, and the status and stability of said medical condition, before a determination is made whether an individual can be cleared with a waiver,

with or without mitigations. You will be asked to obtain information from your clinician about the diagnosis and treatment, and the stability of the condition before a qualification can be determined.

HOW TO COMPLETE THE EXAM PROCESS

GENERAL

22. Q: I am a Temporary or Permanent Seasonal Employee and my supervisor told me I can complete my medical exam while I am in non-pay status. Will I be able to get credit hours or back-pay and/or travel costs reimbursed for completing the physical exam process while in non-pay status?

A. No, you will not be able to be compensated in any manner while in non-pay status. If you wait until you are in pay status, all of your time and travel costs for completing the medical exam process will be compensated.

ACUITY/CHS PROCESS

23. Q: What happens after I choose to use Acuity/CHS to set up my appointment?

A. After you choose to use Acuity/CHS services, you will be contacted within 3 business days via the phone and email address you provided. Acuity will send you instructions for setting up an account in their scheduling system. The firefighter will be asked to answer yes/no to some medical history questions taken directly from the AMP exam to assist the contractor in identifying the appropriate medical provider. You will need to give them dates you are available, and they will schedule the exam with the nearest available medical provider and mail you paperwork and a list of items to bring with you. Payment will be arranged through Acuity.

24. Q: Where do I go for my medical examination and how do I get paperwork?

A. Acuity/CHS will identify the location for your exam and contact you via email and phone to provide you with the information. They will also mail you all the paperwork and a list of items you will need to bring with you to the exam.

25. Q: How can I make the process as smooth as possible?

A. -Be responsive to Acuity's contact attempts.
-Be as flexible as possible with appointment dates and times.
-Don't miss, or be late for, the appointment you schedule.

26. Q: Why do I need to answer more medical history questions for CHS/Acuity?

A. The individuals with CHS/Acuity that are setting up your medical exam appointment, the company that the Forest Service has contracted, do not have access to the medical history questionnaire (FS 5100-41) that you have

completed in eMedical. Because of this, they repeat questions from the medical history questionnaire to ensure you are sent to a medical provider's office that has the necessary equipment (e.g.: audiometer, EKG, x-ray machine) to complete your exam in a timely manner. These questions are identical to those on the medical history questionnaire that you have already completed and do not require you to provide any additional information. You may choose not to answer these questions, but if you do not answer the questions you may need to be sent for additional testing at another location which may delay you being able to complete your work capacity test in a timely manner.

27. Q: Why might I be driving by one clinic to go to another clinic that is further?

- A. There are several possible reasons:
- The closer clinic cannot perform all of the exam components.
 - The closer clinic has refused to contract with Acuity.
 - There are no available appointments at the closer clinic.

If you have clinic suggestions please provide that clinic's information to: SM.FS.MQP_contract@usda.gov or 855-462-1634. Acuity will attempt to include that clinic in their network.

28. Q: What happens in the event of a missed appointment?

- A. Please contact Acuity and reschedule if you cannot make it to avoid late/missed appointment fees! Call Acuity customer service at 855-462-1634, to let them know and reschedule. Please call AT LEAST 24 hours in advance, or as soon as possible if it is an emergency situation, if you will be prevented from keeping your appointment.

29. Q: What if I have concerns/issues with clinic quality?

- A. Please contact: SM.FS.MQP_contract@usda.gov to express your concerns.

PERSONAL MEDICAL PROVIDER PROCESS

30. Q: How do I schedule and pay for my exam if I do not use Acuity/CHS?

Q: Can I use a personal licensed healthcare provider for my arduous duty physical exam? What is the reimbursement process if I use a personal healthcare provider?

- A. If you opt to not use Acuity/CHS' scheduling services, you will need to identify a medical provider who will perform all of the components of the physical and enter the results into eMedical. We will no longer accept paper copies. The medical provider must be a licensed MD, DO, NP/APN or PA. *Chiropractors or Naturopathic Providers may not complete this exam.* Talk to your provider before getting the exam to confirm that they agree to this. You will need to pay for the exam out of pocket and get reimbursed. For

employees, use the Request for Reimbursement form: FS-6500-229 [Miscellaneous Payments - Home \(sharepoint.com\)](#). Administratively Determined Employees (AD's) talk to your local unit about reimbursement through Casual Pay. Government purchase cards may *not* be used for exam payment.

31. Q: What do I need to bring to the exam if I don't use Acuity?

Q: How can my personal healthcare provider access the eMedical system?

- A. If you opt out of using Acuity, you will be emailed a list of instructions. Read this email carefully! It will include a list of documents from the eMedical website (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/fire/safety/emedical>) that you will need to bring with you. Remind your medical provider office to read the instructions carefully to ensure that they enter the results of your exam into the eMedical system correctly.

SELF-CERTIFICATION/BP CHECK

32. Q: What is the proper procedure for obtaining my annual blood pressure check?

- A. Blood pressure checks can be obtained individually, or a crew or district may procure an individual to report to a duty station to take several employee blood pressure readings in a time period. A blood pressure reading must be taken by one of the following levels of medically trained personnel (EMTs/AEMTs/Paramedics, CMAs, LPNs, RNs, PAs, NPs, DOs, MDs) who has been trained to take blood pressures. A document available on the eMedical website (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/fire/safety/emedical>) under "forms" is available to assist in documenting and submitting BP readings.

The following information will be recorded on the Self-Certification Statement form:

- 1) The firefighter's blood pressure reading.
- 2) The medically trained person's full name and title.
- 3) The medically trained person's contact phone number.

33. Q: Can a FS EMS Program EMT or higher qualified personnel be used to take blood pressures for the Self-Certification Statements?

Q: Can a supervisor order an Agency employee with an EMT or paramedic certification to perform blood pressure checks for the self-certification questionnaire?

- A. Agency EMTs cannot be ordered to take blood pressure readings on other Agency personnel to complete the Self-Certification BP Check. Doing so would violate Master Agreement Article 14, since EMT duties are not

covered under current Position Descriptions (PDs) and since EMT duties cannot fall under 'other duties as assigned' since being an EMT requires special training and/or a state/national certification.

However, if that employee is available for a preset time and agrees to perform this task, Agency EMTs may 'volunteer' to provide blood pressure readings for other employees if they feel comfortable doing so and if the Agency employee is a certified EMT/paramedic covered under the USFS National EMS Program medical direction. It's important to note that not every employee with an EMT/paramedic certification will necessarily be covered by the USFS National EMS program, so you should check with the EMT/paramedic or your Forest Safety Officer to confirm this.

NOTE: Forest Service Manual 6942.11, Emergency Medical Services, Integrity of Records - If the EMP (Emergency Medical Provider) believes they are being pressured to provide information that could result in possible ethical, civil, or criminal proceedings (e.g., falsify or change records), they should document any requests, refuse to execute these requests, and notify their immediate superiors and / or EMS Program Leadership (e.g., Anyone from their local EMS Coordinator / LEMA to program leadership in Washington DC).

34. Q: If my blood pressure is above 140/90 on the reading for the Self-Certification Statement, what do I do?

A. A single elevated blood pressure reading is not a disqualifier. You can wait for the RMO to review the document and give instruction, or you can get a repeat blood pressure reading done on another day either at your medical provider's office, by a local EMT, or by an EMT on the Forest (see #33). Have them either on letterhead, or a sheet of paper with a contact number, document the reading, print their name and sign it with a date and either fax to 866-338-6630, email to eMedical SM.FS.mqp_emedical@usda.gov, or you can attach it to your packet and also email eMedical to let the Medical Qualifications Office know that you have attached a document. A document available on the eMedical website (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/fire/safety/emedical>) under "additional forms" is available to assist in documenting and submitting BP readings.

DO NOT ingest any caffeine for 4-6 hours prior to the test or use any nicotine containing products for 1.5 to 2 hours before having your blood pressure taken.

DO take any prescriptions for blood pressure as instructed by your medical provider before having your blood pressure taken.

35. Q: What happens if I ‘fail’ a second/follow-up blood pressure check?

- A. Next steps will depend on whether you have a history of hypertension or other medical conditions. You may be required to provide documentation from a licensed medical provider (MD/DO/NP/PA) stating that your blood pressure is normal (<140/<90) and why it was elevated during the first two readings (e.g.: White Coat Syndrome, pain, illness) or that it is being treated to bring it under control. You also might be instructed on getting BP checks on a somewhat routine basis for a set time period that are documented and then reported to the Medical Officer for review.

MEDICAL QUALIFICATION (aka CLEARANCE)

36. Q: What is the difference between a formal and informal waiver?

- A. An informal waiver is granted at the time the first medical qualification determination is made, after the RMO has reviewed either the exam or the Self-Certification Statement and blood pressure reading, and any additional medical documentation added to fulfill either prior waiver mitigations or at the RMO’s request. A formal waiver is granted after the firefighter receives a “Not Medically Qualified – Information Needed” determination and is given the option to request a waiver and provide further medical documentation on the medical condition.

37. Q: What is the difference between a Mitigation and a Waiver?

- A. A waiver is a statement that your medical condition(s) does not meet a specific Medical Standard, however, it is static and stable and does not interfere with you performing the job functions of arduous duty qualified fireline personnel safely and efficiently and does not endanger the health and safety of yourself or others. A mitigation is a medical accommodation that must be met to ensure, to the best of the Medical Officer’s ability, the status and stability of the medical condition and that the employee is not a hazard to themselves or others.

38. Q: What if I have a pre-existing Waiver with or without Mitigations on file?

- A. All existing Waivers and Mitigations should be found in your past eMedical packet, with a rare exception. Employees are required to meet their mitigations every year to be considered for Medical Qualification by the Medical Officer.

39. Q: I think I'm going to need a waiver. What information can I provide with my Arduous Duty Medical Exam Form or Self-Certification Questionnaire to speed up the waiver process?

- A. If you have not received a waiver granted by the FS Medical Officer in the past 10 years and you have a medical condition, you have a good chance of needing a waiver. If you check "Yes" to any condition listed on the AME or Self-Certification questionnaire, you will have the opportunity to confidentially provide additional written information. It is recommended you include as much information as possible at this time.

There is a list of forms that your provider may be asked to fill out available here: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/fire/safety/emedical>. It is recommended that you have the form for your medical condition completed if you have one of the listed conditions, but do NOT send it in until you are asked for it by the reviewing medical officer.

40. Q: Who makes the final decision in the Waiver Process?

- A. In both the 1st level and 2nd level of the Waiver Process, a USFS Medical Officer or their appointed Adjudicating Review Medical Officer will make the final decision.

41. Q: I have additional medical information that may change my qualification from Not Qualified to Qualified. What should I do?

- A. If you are submitting additional information for a Medical Officer to review, gather all medical records that show the current status of your medical condition as well as any tests or information from your doctor. All follow up testing/labs/other or Doctor visits will be paid for by the individual. This information can be submitted to the Medical Officer by attaching it to your current packet in the Attachments section of eMedical and then notifying the Medical Qualifications Program that the information is there for review via SM.FS.mqp_emedical@usda.gov.