

Space Force launches its first mission with virus precautions

March 26 2020, by Marcia Dunn



A United Launch Alliance Atlas V rocket lifts off from launch complex 41 at the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station with a payload of a high frequency satellite Thursday, March 26, 2020, in Cape Canaveral, Fla. Built by Lockheed Martin, this U.S. military spacecraft will provide highly-secure communications. (AP Photo/John Raoux)

The newly established U.S. Space Force launched its first national security satellite Thursday with a leaner staff because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"Nothing stops the space launch mission!" the 45th Space Wing tweeted from Cape Canaveral.

The approximately \$1 billion satellite is the sixth and final one in the U.S. military's Advanced Extremely High Frequency series. Upgraded from the older Milstar satellites, the constellation has provided secure communication from 22,000 miles (35,400 kilometers) up for nearly a decade.

A powerful Atlas V rocket hoisted the 13,600-pound (6,168 kilogram) satellite. The new Space Force seal adorned the United Launch Alliance rocket.

The Space Force officially became a new branch of the U.S. military in December.

With the viewing area closed because of the coronavirus outbreak, fewer people than usual watched the liftoff from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station.

United Launch Alliance chief executive Tory Bruno said non-essential personnel were banned from the launch control room to reduce the size of the crowd.

"Can't quite get 6 ft everywhere. Surfaces will be cleaned between people, etc.," tweeted Bruno, who monitored the launch from company headquarters in Denver. He normally travels to the launch site.

Another pandemic effect: Cape Canaveral Air Force Station's planned name change to Cape Canaveral Space Force Station is on hold.



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