

NASA's next Mars rover honors medical teams fighting virus

June 18 2020, by Marcia Dunn



This photo provided by NASA/JPL-Caltech in June 2020 shows a 3-by-5-inch (8-by-13-centimeter) aluminum plate between the wheels at center and right, which commemorates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and pays tribute to the perseverance of healthcare workers around the world, attached to the Perseverance Mars rover, in Pasadena, Calif. NASA is pressing ahead with a July 20 launch, despite the pandemic. (NASA/JPL-Caltech via AP)

NASA's next Mars rover is honoring all the medical workers on the front

lines of the coronavirus battle around the world.

With just another month until liftoff, the [space agency](#) on Wednesday revealed a commemorative plate attached to the rover, aptly named Perseverance.

The rover team calls it the COVID-19 Perseverance plate, designed in the last couple months.

The black and white aluminum plate—3-by-5 inches (8-by-13 centimeters)—shows planet Earth atop a staff entwined with a serpent, a symbol of the medical community. The path of the spacecraft also is depicted, with its origin from Cape Canaveral.

Health care workers were "on front lines keeping us safe" during launch preparations, said deputy project manager Matt Wallace of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California.

"They really inspired us, I think, through this period, and we hope that this plate and we hope that this mission in some small way can inspire them in return," Wallace told reporters.

The rover's name, Perseverance, has taken on added meaning the last few months, according to NASA officials. It's hard enough preparing a spacecraft for Mars, but doing it in the middle of a pandemic made it even harder, Wallace said. Additional work shifts were added to reduce the number of people working on the rover at any one time and ensure social distancing. Others had to work from home.



This photo provided by NASA/JPL-Caltech in June 2020 shows a 3-by-5-inch (8-by-13-centimeter) aluminum plate which commemorates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and pays tribute to the perseverance of healthcare workers around the world, attached to the Perseverance Mars rover, in Pasadena, Calif. NASA is pressing ahead with a July 20 launch, despite the pandemic. (NASA/JPL-Caltech via AP)

NASA is pressing ahead with a July 20 launch, even as the number of COVID-19 cases continue to rise in Florida. This mission—to seek signs of past microbial life on Mars and collect rock and [soil samples](#) for eventual return to Earth—is considered essential by the space agency.

If the [rover](#) isn't launched by mid-August, it would need to wait until 2022 when Earth and Mars are back in proper alignment. A two-year delay could add another \$500 million to the nearly \$3 billion mission.

Unlike for SpaceX's first astronaut launch late last month, NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine isn't urging the public to stay home and watch online to avoid crowds.

"It appears they didn't listen to us," Bridenstine said. "So we're asking people to follow all of the necessary guidelines to keep themselves safe and we're trusting that they will."

Perseverance is one of three upcoming missions to Mars. The United Arab Emirates and China also are preparing spacecraft for launch to the red planet by mid-August.

© 2020 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without permission.

Citation: NASA's next Mars rover honors medical teams fighting virus (2020, June 18) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-06-nasa-mars-rover-honors-medical.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.