

10 FAQs

About Your FAA Medical Exam

by Captain Jenny Beatty

Introduction

I've been getting FAA medical exams every other year, annually, or biannually, for 39 years. In my early years as a pilot, different Aviation Medical Examiners had already done breast and pelvic exams during my FAA medical exams before I found out that these were not required. In fact, FAA aeromedical certification standards do not specifically reference the menstrual cycle, pregnancy, or any female-specific health conditions, at all, and never have.

I thought this problem had gone away—but I was wrong. Recently, a few women pilots expressed discomfort about getting unneeded breast exams, and men pilots about getting unneeded rectal exams, on their FAA medical exams. Some more pilots chimed in about their own experiences, and all of them were surprised to find out that these exams weren't required.

No one should be subjected to unnecessary, inappropriate examination of their private parts.

Even though it is a doctor examining you, and even though that doctor is an AME, and even though you really want an FAA medical certificate, that doesn't mean you need to allow your private parts to be examined when it's not medically necessary or required by the FAA for medical certification.

These 10 Frequently Asked Questions will help you learn what's appropriate on your FAA medical exam, what is not, and what you can do about that.

Sources

Federal Aviation Administration website www.faa.gov. Guide for Aviation Medical Examiners, Application Process for Medical Certification, Exam Techniques and Criteria for Qualification, August 9, 2020.

Government Publishing Office website, www.gpo.gov. 14 CFR Part 67 Airmen Medical Standards and Certification, August 9, 2020.

Dr. Joye Holmes, FAA Regional Flight Surgeon, Great Lakes Region. Personal interview, April 26, 2019.

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1. How can I screen an Aviation Medical Examiner (AME), prior to my FAA medical exam?

- Ask your pilot friends for AME recommendations; ask about their actual experience.
- Call the AME's office and inquire if the doctor normally requires patients to disrobe for the FAA medical exam, and if so, whether a chaperone will be present.
- Investigate whether a chaperone is required by law in your state.

2. Does an FAA medical exam normally include a breast exam? pelvic or vaginal exam? rectal exam?

- NO, the FAA medical exam does not normally require these exams.
- There should no need to remove your bra or underwear for the AME's physical examination, *except as below...*

3. When might the AME want to do a breast, pelvic, vaginal, or rectal exam?

- When you request such an exam for preventive health maintenance.
- When the AME is also your Primary Care Physician, Obstetrician, or Gynecologist who is doing a more thorough annual health exam at the same time.
- Possibly when you have a history or current issues in these areas...
 - o Examples: rectal bleeding, fissures, hemorrhoids.
 - o Medical records of treatment by your personal doctor might take the place of the AME examining you in these areas. Discuss with your AME in advance.
- When a male is examining a female patient, a female chaperone should be present.

4. What about the electrocardiogram for the First Class medical certificate?

- The ECG / EKG requires placement of electrodes around the chest area, which usually means you need to remove your bra.
- The person placing the electrodes can be a trained nurse, technician, or the AME.
- When a male is doing the ECG / EKG for a female patient, a female chaperone should be present.

5. When should a female practitioner or chaperone be present?

- For female patients, when...
 - o The breast area is exposed, as for a breast exam or an ECG / EKG.
 - o For any pelvic, vaginal, or rectal exam.
 - o In those states where required by law.

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6. What can I do if the AME does not follow this protocol, does not provide a female chaperone when needed, is making me uncomfortable, or if I have another concern?

- You can speak up and say something like: “I do not need a breast exam, I have no history of problems and no scars – please move on to the rest of the exam.”
- You can stop the exam right then.
- You can report the issue to the FAA afterwards.

7. What happens if either I or the AME stop the exam partway through?

- Contact your FAA Regional Office immediately.
- They will assist you with your MedXpress Form 8500 medical application form.
- They will assist you with getting your FAA medical exam completed with another AME.

8. How can I report an issue with an AME?

- Use the FAA hotline (you may remain anonymous): [hotline.faa.gov](https://www.faa.gov/hotline).
- Contact your FAA Regional Office.
- Contact your State Medical Board.

9. What happens when I report an issue or concern to the FAA?

- All reported problems with AMEs go to the appropriate FAA Regional Office.
- The FAA Regional Flight Surgeon will initiate an investigation.
- They may request a brief narrative from you about what happened, if you provided your name.
- The FAA Regional Flight Surgeon and staff are responsible for oversight and also investigate complaints about AMEs in their region.
- The FAA can and does “un-designate” AMEs for a variety of reasons, including poor quality exams, lack of professionalism, and on the basis of complaints.

10. Where can I get more information about FAA medical certification and the exam?

- **Q&A:** Federal Aviation Administration website (www.faa.gov). Licenses & Certificates, Medical Certification, Medical Certificates, Questions and Answers.
- **Resources:** Airplane Owners and Pilots Association (www.aopa.org). Pilot Resources, Medical Resources.