

Take the XPRESS Lane

Learn How to Fast-Track Your Airman Medical Certificate

Who doesn't love a shortcut? These days, electronic toll systems let you breeze past miles of traffic. Smartphone-purchased movie tickets enable a beeline to the popcorn line. Even Disney World has perfected the art of bypassing dreadfully long queues with their FASTPASS® system. Evolving technology has certainly helped in facilitating these time, and money (and sanity) savers which are finding their way into more and more segments of business and society. Realizing the potential for improved cost-savings, convenience, and accuracy, the FAA is also an avid proponent of leveraging technology to improve efficiency in many of its tasks.

A good example is the FAA's MedXpress system for handling airman medical certification applications. Although hardly new, the system recently became a required means of obtaining a pilot medical certificate. As of October 1, 2012, the FAA said good-bye to the paper application and has embraced the online system as the sole means of obtaining an airman medical. However, with an average of less than 40 percent of airman medical applications being submitted via MedXpress the year prior to the new requirement, there are still quite a few pilots who will need to make the transition in the near future.

The good news is MedXpress is easy to use. And you don't have to take my word for how simple it is. Just ask anyone who's used the system. In fact, before I began writing this article, I polled a few of my pilot friends to see how they felt about MedXpress. Those who had used it gave it an overwhelming thumbs up. Others — as I suspect some of you who are reading this now — were unfamiliar, but eager to learn, especially when it means less time in the doctor's office!

First Step – Set Up an Account

For those brand new to MedXpress, your first step is to set up an account. From the home page of MedXpress (<https://medxpress.faa.gov/>), find the *Request Account* link in the upper left corner. Click the link, and then enter your name, email address, and three security questions. You'll also be asked to acknowledge the Terms of Service Agreement and Pilot's Bill of Rights Notification before hitting the submit button (as well as any other time you log in, for that matter). Ideally, it should only take a few minutes for you to receive a confirmation message to the email address you supplied. If not, give it a couple hours before making an inquiry.

Write down (or right-click and copy) the temporary password you receive from your confirmation email message and click the link that will enable you to log in and complete your registration. After entering your temporary password, you will be asked to create a new password before continuing. Be sure you read and consider all the number, letter, and special character parameters for a secure password when doing so.

8500.8

That's how many questions are on the new form. Just kidding; it's actually the official form number for a medical certificate. Once you're logged in and ready to get started, look for the link to *Form 8500.8* in the top left corner. The link will open an electronic version of the form with a combination of checkboxes, radio buttons, drop-down menus,



and free-fill text boxes in the same order as the questions from the old paper form. Once you get past all the standard background and demographic bits, you'll be asked for specifics on your medical history, beginning with what types of medication you currently use.

According to Dr. Judith Frazier, a medical officer with FAA Office of Aerospace Medicine's Certification Division, this is one area that tends to get some applicants hung up. "Be sure to specifically list the dosage and frequency of all medications you are taking," says Frazier. "If the amount or frequency options available on the form do not match your personal usage, you'll need to provide an explanation." In cases like this, you can write in the explanation with the *Add Comment* button at the end of Question 18.

Another consideration when entering a medication is to make sure you use its specific name, and not just the category it pertains to, (e.g., beta-blockers or blood thinners). If you're unsure of the spelling, MedXpress can help. It will verify the name of your medication (generic or name-brand) with a built-in dictionary. Even if it is not an accepted drug, the system should find it. And if for some reason your medication doesn't show up, click the *Medication Not Found* box. Your AME can always review the form with you during your appointment and make any needed adjustments before submitting.

Is This Better? How About This?

Frazier also advises pilots to pay particular attention to question 17b regarding near-vision contact lenses. "The intent of this question is really to identify someone who is monocular and who may be using one far- and one near-sighted contact

The screenshot shows the FAA MedXPress web interface. At the top, it says "Federal Aviation Administration" and "FAA MedXPress". Below that are navigation links for home, logout, help, and a user guide. A note instructs users to enter all dates in MMDDYYYY format. The form contains several sections:

- Personal information: 1. Application For (Airmen Medical Cert., Airman Medical & Student Pilot Cert.), 2. Class of Medical Cert., 3. Last Name, 4. E-mail, 5. Address, 6. Date of Birth, 7. Eye Color, 8. Eye Color, 9. Sex, 10. Marital Status, 11. Citizenship.
- 12. Type of Airmen Certificate(s) You Hold: Pilot, ATC Recipient, Flight Instructor, Recipient, Airline Transport, Flight Engineer, Private, Other, Commercial, Flight Navigator, Student.
- 13. Have Your FAA Airmen Medical Certificate Ever Been Denied, Suspended, or Revoked? (Yes/No/If yes, give date).
- 14. To Date, 15. Past 6 months, 16. Date of Last FAA Medical Application.
- 17. Do You Currently Use Any Medication (Prescription or Nonprescription)? (Yes/No).
- Medication table: For each medication prescribed, enter medication information and click the Add button. Columns include Medication, Dosage, Strength, Frequency, and Previously Reported.
- 18. Medical History: A grid of 20 questions (a-t) with Yes/No options. Questions cover conditions like recurrent severe headaches, diabetes, alcoholism, epilepsy, chronic sinusitis, asthma, heart or vascular disease, high or low blood pressure, hernia, eye or orbital injury, kidney stones, diabetes, neurological disorders, seizures, stroke, aneurysm, etc.
- 19. Arrest and/or Conviction and/or Administrative Action History: History of any arrests and/or convictions involving driving while intoxicated, or while impaired by or while under the influence of alcohol or a drug, or (2) history of any arrests, and/or convictions, and/or administrative actions involving an offense which resulted in the denial, suspension, termination, or revocation of driving privileges or which resulted in probation or an educational or a rehabilitation program.
- 20. Have you visited any health professionals within the last 3 years? (Yes/No).

 At the bottom, there is an "Add Comments" button and a note: "To add a Medical Visit, enter information in the spaces provided and click the Add button. Note: You must click the add button for each visit entered."

A screen shot from FAA MedXPress, which replaced the paper form 8500.8 in October 2012.

lens.” The use of regular contact lenses is allowed. Even bifocal contacts are allowed after an adjustment period. If this is how you wear contacts, check *no* to box 17b.

However, if you choose to wear a contact in one eye that give you near vision and a contact in the other eye that gives you far vision, you must check *yes* to box 17b. This is considered monocular vision and is not allowed; Monocular vision can cause problems with depth perception which is essential when flying and landing a plane. If you have had eye surgery such as LASIK, and you have permanent monocular vision, you may need to do a Medical Flight Test (MFT) to show you can compensate. The other alternative is to wear glasses after eye surgery to correct your vision. Reference the AME Guide for more specifics on the use of contact lenses.

Know Your History

Next up on the form is question 18, where users will need to provide information on their medical history. You must select either *yes* or *no* for each of the items lettered *a* through *y*. These cover everything from asthma to alcohol abuse. Any *yes* answers under the medical history will require a comment. To do so, just click the *Add Comment* button under the question after you’ve completed answering every part. The system will automatically provide individual comment boxes for each item you answered with a *yes*. If it is something you reported during a prior medical and there has been no change since, you can click the *PRNC* checkbox to indicate the condition or ailment was “previously reported, no change.” Otherwise, use the provided space to date and describe the condition to the best of your ability.

If there is a condition, disability, or surgery you’ve had that is not listed in Question 18, use option *x* to report it. Also remember that this question is asking if there are illnesses or conditions you may have now or had in the past. Once you’ve reported something, you’ll always need to include it on your medical application. This is an important point that can be easily overlooked, but can have serious consequences later on.

Question 19 of the medical application appears the same way as the old form, but has a much easier way to input any of your health professional visits from the last three years. Use the text boxes to fill in the data regarding a visit, and then click the *add* button, which will populate the information into organized rows below the question. If you make a mistake or need to make a change, use the *edit* or *delete* options that correspond with each visit. It may be helpful to gather the dates and reasons for each visit ahead of time. Routine eye or dental exams need not be reported.

Finally, Question 20 of the form is simply a consent authorization for the National Driver Register and certification of your declarations on the form. You must select *yes* to continue and submit the form.

Validating ...

You’re almost there. All that’s left is validating your form, which is one of the features that really help this electronic form shine. “With the old hard copy, both airmen and AMEs could easily miss things on their applications,” says Frazier. “That often meant we had to issue the dreaded letter requesting more information. Spelling mistakes or illegible handwriting also were frequent culprits of delaying an airmen medical certificate, but they have now been all but eliminated with the MedXPress system.”

By hitting the *Show Validation Errors* button at the bottom of the form, the system will save all your changes and check through your application for any mistakes. Anything the system discovers will be listed along with a corresponding section number. Typical mistakes are blank fields or missing explanations. Once you have corrected the errors, you're ready to send. Just remember that you can't change anything on the form after submitting, so check that everything is correct first.

If your form has been successfully submitted, you'll see a screen with a unique confirmation number. "Write down the number, because you'll need it when it comes time for your medical," says Jana Weems, a program analyst with FAA's Aerospace Medical Certification Division. The confirmation number is what verifies your identity and completes the electronic signature process at your exam. Weems also suggests that airmen click on the *Exam Summary* button, which takes the data from the online form and populates it into a PDF version that resembles the old paper Form 8500.8. "You can save this on your computer for your personal records as well as print a copy to bring to your doctor, especially since it also contains your confirmation number," says Weems.

Remember to ask your AME for a copy of the finished exam. This will have all of the information you put in as well as the comments from the AME to help you with your next exam.

Help and Support

The MedXPress website has everything you need for help in case you get stuck. From the login page you can access the MedXPress user guide, a Q&A on system basics, and a list of contacts for technical support and login issues. If you have problems with how to answer a particular question on the form, try clicking the small grey question mark in front of every section. This will help give you some direction on what specific information the FAA is looking for. If you're still unsure about a particular question, consult your AME at the time of your exam. He or she will be able to make corrections to the form before it is submitted.

During a recent MedXPress information seminar, Dr. Warren Silberman, a Pilot Protection Services Consultant with AOPA, stressed a number of other important considerations that need to be made when using MedXPress. Among them was to remember that once your information is submitted, it expires and is deleted after 60 days. Silberman suggests pilots schedule their medical exams within about 30 days of submitting the application.

Another benefit of MedXPress, according to Silberman, is that "there is no one out there looking

at these forms, even after you hit the submit button. In the old days, the minute you start writing on the form, you have 'sealed the deal' and it belongs to the FAA. With MedXPress, until the AME enters your confirmation number and brings the exam into the AME system, it's not yet an official application and you can still back out."

A Win-Win

In review, MedXPress has already proven to be a system that is faster, more accurate, and easier for both you and your AME. So, when it's time for your next medical, you can replace any hesitation with exultation as you take a ride in the XPress lane! ✈️

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Timeout!

The MedXPress system is designed to automatically time out after 20 minutes of inactivity, so make sure you're saving your work as you go. If you're on the Form 8500-8 screen, you'll get a warning after 15 minutes of inactivity. If no actions are performed within five minutes of the warning, the session will time out and any unsaved information will be lost.

Learn More

MedXPress Video

www.faa.gov/tv/?mediald=554

MedXPress User's Guide

<https://medxpress.faa.gov/medxpress/Guides/MedXPressUsersGuide.pdf>

AME Guide

www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/avs/offices/aam/ame/guide/app_process/general/