What you need to know about Coronavirus (COVID-19)

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Choose VA

This guide will help you learn how to use your VA health care benefits during this emerging health crisis and will provide links and resources you can reference to protect yourself and others.

What Veterans need to know about coronavirus (COVID-19)

If you develop symptoms of COVID-19, you should seek immediate medical advice on appropriate next steps (Note: symptoms are listed on the back page).

VA is ready to assist you. We have plans in place to protect everyone who receives health care, visits or works at one of our facilities. VA recommends the following:

1 **Increase your awareness of COVID-19 symptoms by reading the VA and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) information.**

- VA and CDC have posted and routinely update the latest information about COVID-19.
- Online addresses/links for both VA and CDC COVID-19 information are provided to the right.

2 **Contact your VA Medical Center before going to a clinic, urgent care or emergency room, especially if you have symptoms of fever, cough or shortness of breath. Contacting us first helps us protect you, medical staff and other patients.**

- For routine appointments, we recommend reaching out to your provider to ask about using telehealth (phone or video) for your scheduled appointment. You can also cancel and reschedule your appointment for a later date.
- To change your appointment to a telehealth appointment, send a secure message to your provider in My HealtheVet.

3 **Leave time for screening**

- If you visit a VA hospital, clinic, community living center, or other VA health care facility, you will be met at the entrance by a staff member.
- The staffer will greet you and ask you some screening questions.
- A VA health care professional will then assist you with the next steps of your visit.

4 **Stay connected and healthy**

Concerns about COVID-19 can be stressful for many people, and it's understandable to feel anxious. It's important to take steps to manage stress and take care of yourself. Stay in touch with friends and family by phone and social media, and get enough sleep and exercise.

HOW CAN I FIND THE MOST CURRENT INFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19

- *Visit* the **CDC COVID-19** information page online at: **https://www.coronavirus.gov**

- *Learn* about VA's public health response to COVID-19: **https://www.va.gov/coronavirus**

- *Read* FAQs for Veterans about accessing your health care benefits during this outbreak: **https://www.va.gov/coronavirus-veteran-frequently-asked-questions**

- *Learn* about ways to manage and enhance your mental health during the emerging health crisis: **https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/coronavirus**

- *Send* your primary care provider a secure message through MyHealtheVet at: **https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/home**

This information is up to date as of March 27th, 2020. This document will be updated as new information becomes available.

How is COVID-19 spread?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) the virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person.

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).

- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.

- Droplets can also land and remain active on surfaces several hours to days depending on the surface material.

Who is most at risk of contracting COVID-19?

Older adults (60+) and people who have severe chronic medical conditions like heart or lung disease or diabetes are at higher risk for developing complications from COVID-19. If you are in this population, please consult with your VA health care provider about additional steps you may be able to take to protect yourself.

What are the most effective ways to protect myself?

Clean your hands often

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm (or hot) water for at least 20 seconds, especially after you have been in a public place or after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing. An easy way to mark the time is to hum the "Happy Birthday" song from beginning to end twice while scrubbing.

- If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.

Avoid close contact

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

- Put distance between yourself and other people if COVID-19 is spreading in your community. This is especially important for people who are at higher risk of getting very sick.

Clean and disinfect frequently

- Touched surfaces daily. This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets and sinks.

- If surfaces are dirty, clean them—use detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.

- For more complete and updated information on cleaning and disinfecting visit CDC online at: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html

Getting a flu shot is recommended

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

What are COVID-19 symptoms?

COVID-19 symptoms include:
fever, cough and shortness of breath.

I am sick with COVID-19 or think I might have it. How can I best protect others?

If you are sick, stay home except to get medical care.

Cover coughs and sneezes:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue (or use inside of your elbow).

- Throw used tissues in the trash.

- Immediately wash your hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are unavailable, clean your hands with sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Wear a facemask if you are sick when:

- You are around other people (e.g. sharing a room or a vehicle).

- Before entering a health care facility.

If you are NOT sick, you do not need to wear a facemask unless you are caring for someone who is sick.

Where can I learn more about COVID-19?

- How to protect against coronavirus at: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/prevention.html

- Handwashing video at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d914EnpU4Fo

- Isolation vs. Quarantine – Know the Difference at: https://www.publichealth.va.gov/n-coronavirus/docs/Isolation_Quarantine_Poster_prevent17-2020.pdf