



# VETERAN HEALTH NEWS

VA SAN DIEGO HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

May 2020

## May is Mental Health Month



The COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak has the potential to increase stress and anxiety, both because of concerns about the virus and because of uncertainty about how the outbreak will affect us socially and economically. Mental Health providers at the VASDHS are aware of the challenges being faced by our Veteran community. We have taken steps to ensure that the maximum number of Veterans have access to timely mental health support by utilizing innovative technologies (e.g., [VA Video Connect](#)) to minimize need for travel to clinics. We encourage all Veterans experiencing increased stress to reach out to your VA provider. If you have an urgent or life-threatening issue, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. You may also reach the [Veterans Crisis Line](#) at 1-800-273-8255, and press “1” at the prompt.

For those interested in learning about tools to manage stress on their own, please check out the newly released [COVID Coach](#) mobile app or visit these VA websites:

<https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/coronavirus/>

<https://www.ptsd.va.gov/covid>

## Moving Forward

We are currently working to identify time-sensitive appointments or procedures that should be conducted now as we transition to more “business as usual” while setting the expectations for the new normal. We have started testing for COVID-19 prior to any admission or high-risk procedure and setting up curbside or drive-up testing by provider order and appointment.

## Women Vets and COVID



The VA San Diego Healthcare System, women Veterans can still access primary care services via telehealth appointments with their providers. The Gynecology Department has re-scheduled non-urgent surgery and office visits through May 15 and patients will be offered telehealth if appropriate. Veterans seeking maternity care do not need to take a lab test to confirm their pregnancy; they can contact their PCP to enter a consult for maternity care.

## Tip of the Month: Online Access to Release of Information (ROI)

Great News! You can now communicate with the Release of Information (ROI) department through Secure Messaging in your My HealtheVet premium account. Here's how:

**Step 1** – Log in to your My HealtheVet Premium account.

**Step 2** – Create a new message by selecting the **Compose Message** button from the Dashboard or **Compose a Message** from your **Inbox**.

**Step 3** – Select **\*SD Release of Information (ROI)\*** from the drop-down arrow in the **To** field. (Only your participating VA Health Care Team and other VA staff will appear on the list, if you do not see **\*SD Release of Information (ROI)\*** on your available list please contact ROI at 858-642-3661, option 4.

**Step 4** – Select the Subject of your message by selecting the appropriate option.

**Step 5** – Attach your authorization and any supporting documents to the message using the add attachment button.

**Step 6** – Type your message.

**Step 7** – When you have completed the message, select the **Send** button.

ROI staff will respond to your secure message within three business days, please allow up to 20 business days for processing of your request.

Due to attachment limitations, ROI is unable to attach requested medical records to a secure message. You can view, print and/or download your medical records through the VA Blue Button feature on your My HealtheVet dashboard. Release of Information can attach a completed medical statement or form through secure messaging if requested.

## Stand Down Postponed



Stand Down, originally scheduled for June 26-28, 2020, has been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A new date and location have not been announced at this time. Official information will appear on the VVSD website [www.vvsd.net](http://www.vvsd.net).

## Nurses Week and Public Service Recognition Week

During Nurse and Public Service Recognition Week, we recognize and thank our dedicated nurses and all staff who provide quality, compassionate care for Veterans. Thanks to all our dedicated staff who are serving Veterans during the COVID-pandemic.

## Upgrade Your My HealtheVet Account Online or by VA Video Connect



While VA facilities across the nation, including VA San Diego, have postponed most face-to-face visits to help reduce the spread of the coronavirus, having an upgraded [My HealthVet](#) account has never been more important. My HealthVet, VA's private and secure online health care portal, offers VA patients one-stop access to invaluable tools such as Secure Messaging (similar to email) and prescription refills from the comfort and safety of their own homes. But, to protect patient privacy, VA requires patients verify their identities before giving them access the site's most popular features. Today, with current social distancing restrictions in place, we now offer two convenient ways patients can verify their identities and upgrade their accounts remotely to begin enjoying all My HealthVet has to offer today:

- Online Using a Sign-in Partner (DS Logon Premium or ID.me)
  1. From the sign-in page, sign in to your Advanced My HealthVet account using a Sign-in Partner
  2. Select the Upgrade Now button
  3. Check the certification box to verify you are the owner of the My HealthVet account
  4. Select Continue
  5. Check the Accept My HealthVet Terms & Conditions box
  6. Select Continue
  7. After selecting Continue, your My HealthVet account will upgrade to a Premium account
  
- Via VA Video Connect with VA San Diego's Release of Information Office
  1. Call (858) 642-3661
  2. Press 4
  3. Then press 1
  4. A VA San Diego ROI staff member will assist you

Have a valid government-issued photo ID on hand and a valid secondary form of ID when your primary ID does not match your official VA medical record (in cases such as recent name changes).

**Keep Your Face Covered When in Public**



On April 1, 2020, the California Department of Public Health issued guidance to the “general public” to utilize cloth face coverings when leaving their home for essential activities, especially in situations where social distancing is difficult to maintain. Effective May 1, 2020, San Diego County has stated that everyone must wear a face covering anywhere in public they come within 6 feet of another person. These recommendations came after studies showed that people infected with COVID-19 may not show symptoms but may still be able to spread the virus to others. Wearing a face covering helps block respiratory droplets from being released in the air when someone speaks, sneezes, or coughs.

Similarly, we expect that anyone entering any VA San Diego facility will wear a face covering in order to prevent inadvertent spread of coronavirus. If anyone entering the facility does not have a face covering, one will be provided.

**Homemade face masks or cloth coverings** are an acceptable alternative to the medical grade face masks, which should be reserved for medical professionals. Click on the link for “do it yourself” information for making and maintaining face coverings <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/DIY-cloth-face-covering-instructions.pdf>

**Importantly**, the use of face coverings should be used *in addition* to frequent hand washing, avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth, staying home, and practicing social distancing by staying at least six feet away from others when out in public.

## VA San Diego COVID-19 Resource Guide

Times can be challenging for Veteran families right now and we’d like to help. Please check out this [collection](#) of local resources.

## Take the 2020 Census

Did you know the #2020census consists of 10 short questions and is used to count every person living in the United States, the five inhabited territories and the District of Columbia? Respond online now:

[www.2020census.gov#facts](http://www.2020census.gov#facts)

## Get Instant Updates Through GovDelivery



Get all the latest in VA San Diego feature stories, newsletters and information by registering with our GovDelivery service. To participate, go to our internet homepage and enter your email in the box “Connect with VA San Diego Healthcare System.”

## Research Opportunities



Help us advance the science of health care by volunteering for a human subject research project at VA San Diego Healthcare System. More information can be found [here](#).

## Calendar

**Public Service Recognition Week:** May 3 - 9

**Nurses Week:** May 6 - 12

**Mother's Day:** March 10

**National VA Research Recognition Week:** May 11 - 15

**Ramadan Ends:** May 23

**Comments and suggestions about our newsletter? Send them to  
[Christopher.menzie@va.gov](mailto:Christopher.menzie@va.gov)**

## Please Take Our Patient Satisfaction Surveys

We need feedback on your health care experience to continue improving the high-quality care and customer service we provide. We send our patient satisfaction surveys via mail and email on a regular basis and if you receive one, please take a moment to complete it. We are listening and want to improve – if you have a good or bad experience, we want to hear from you. We want you to Choose VA!

### About VA San Diego Healthcare System



The VA San Diego Healthcare System (VASDHS) provides a wide range of inpatient and outpatient services at the medical center in La Jolla; and at six community clinics located in Chula Vista, Escondido, Imperial Valley, Mission Valley, Oceanside, Sorrento Valley and at the Rio Clinic. We provide medical, surgical, mental health, geriatric, spinal cord injury and advanced rehabilitation services. VASDHS has 296 authorized hospital beds including skilled nursing beds and operates several regional referral programs including cardiovascular surgery and spinal cord injury care.

We are affiliated with the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine and provide training for 1,399 medical interns, residents and fellows as well as 676 other health profession trainees in areas such as nursing, pharmacy, dental and dietetics. VASDHS has one of the largest research programs in the VA nationally with a budget of \$44.3 million, >211 principal investigators and 676 projects.

**Number of Veterans who received care from VASDHS in FY 2019:** ..... 86,138  
**\*Number of Veterans in San Diego County:** .....238,352  
**\*Number of Veterans in Imperial Valley:** .....6,069  
**Total Veterans living in SD & Imperial Valley Counties:** ....244,421

*\*from VetPro, 9/30/2019*

### Important Phone Numbers:

VASDHS Main Line: ..... (858) 552-8585  
VASDHS Patient Call Center  
(Appointments/Questions): ... (858) 552-7475  
Health Benefits & Enrollment: (858) 552-7523  
Billing (Copays, etc.): ..... (866) 802-6381  
Community Care Authorization Line: (858) 623-1879  
Billing (Community Care):.... (858) 657-1313  
Billing (TriWest): .....(855) 722-2838  
Request your Records: ..... (858) 642-3661  
Suicide Prevention: ... (800) 273-8255, press 1

### VA Secretary Wilkie's Priorities:

- Customer Service
- Implementing the MISSION Act
- Electronic Health Record
- Transforming our Business Systems