

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
Southern Nevada Healthcare System



VASNHS Director's Video Message to Veterans

Mr. William J. "Bill" Caron, Director and CEO of the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System recently recorded a video message for Veteran patients and the community to provide an update on local VA impacts due to COVID-19. *(Click on photo to watch)*

VASNHS COVID-19 Update - 3/28/2020

To Our Southern Nevada Veterans, Families, Caregivers and Stakeholders:

Thank you for your patience and understanding as we continue to manage our local response to COVID-19. This is an ever-evolving situation and our team here at the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System is working diligently to provide for your personal medical needs, while

supporting public safety directives related to social distancing and large gatherings.

These are unique times and COVID-19 continues to redefine how we deliver care and provide services. As such, we want to take this opportunity to provide you with an updated list of local impacts and interim changes. We are also including some general COVID-19 information, as well as links to national and local COVID-19 resources.

Our hope to return to normal operations as quickly as possible, but these temporary changes are necessary -- both for your personal safety and to ensure we are focused and ready to respond and care for any Veteran patients affected by COVID-19.

We realize many of you count on the VA a lifeline, particularly when dealing with stressful events such as this. As such, we have the following resources available:

VA Mental Health COVID-19 Web Page

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

Chaplaincy Support

The VASNHS chaplaincy support number for Veterans is: 702-275-3011. This number can be contacted at any time.

Veteran Crisis Line

If you are a Veteran in crisis, you can call 1-800-273-TALK (Option 1).
OR Text 838255; OR confidential chat: www.veteranscrisisline.net.

Veterans who have flu-like symptoms such as fever, cough and shortness of breath should contact us immediately **before** you visit one of our VA facilities. Call us at 702-791-9000 (option 3) or 877-252-4866.

For more information on what Veterans need to know about COVID-19, please visit the [VA's Frequently Asked Questions Page](#).

Local VA Impacts

Out of an abundance of caution due to COVID-19 and to limit the risk of exposure to patients and staff, the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System (VASNHS) has implemented the following actions:

(UPDATED) Screenings at VASNHS entrances

Everyone who enters any VASNHS facilities will be pre-screened and **will have their temperature checked**. This may lengthen entry times, so patients are advised to allow for extra time when arriving for their appointments.

Beginning March 29, anyone who visits the North Las Vegas VA Medical Center will be screened at the facility's vehicle entrances.

Individuals found to be at potential risk for a COVID-19 infection will be immediately isolated to prevent potential spread to others and cared for using established CDC and VA protocols.

(UPDATED) Virtual Primary Care & Behavioral Health Appointments

VASNHS is moving as many primary care and behavioral health appointments to virtual care as possible. Veterans can access options such as [Telehealth](#), [MyHealthVet Secure Messaging](#) or [VA Video Connect](#) for their appointments. To request a virtual care appointment or to convert an in-person appointment to virtual care, call 702-791-9024. [CLICK HERE for more information local virtual care.](#)

(NEW) Lab/Imaging discontinued at VA clinics in Las Vegas valley

In an effort to support social distancing protocols and reduce traffic at VA community clinics, VASNHS will discontinue lab and imaging services at all VA community clinics in the Las Vegas Valley effective Monday, March 30. Necessary (non-routine) lab work will continue in Pahrump and Laughlin by appointment only. VASNHS providers will be reviewing patient charts and postponing any routine labs for Veteran patients until a later date.

Necessary imaging and lab work for Veteran patients within the Las Vegas Valley will be conducted at the North Las Vegas VA Medical Center. The lab will run extended hours at the medical center from 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday-Friday.

(NEW) Elective dental procedures postponed

VASNHS' Dental Service has postponed all elective dental procedures both locally and in the community. Dental is available at VASNHS from 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday through Friday for dental emergencies. VHA has placed a temporary pause from Mission Act access standards for routine care. Community care consults/authorizations for urgent dental matters will continue without interruption.

(NEW) Nevada VBA offices closed until further notice

Per Nevada Governor Steve Sisolak's order to "Stay at Home" during the COVID-19 Pandemic, Director Franko Fritz closed the Veteran Benefits Administration's Reno Regional Office building, as well as the Las Vegas Satellite Office (located in the North Las Vegas VA Medical Center), effective March 24. All mail will be held by the USPS and UPS until further notice. This closure is in effect until further notice.

(NEW) DAV temporarily ceases transportation April 1

The Disabled American Veterans Transportation System will temporarily cease operations effective April 1. All other volunteer programs have already been suspended. The Voluntary Service office remains open and can be reached at (702) 791-9134.

(NEW) Veterans Experience discontinues in-person services

All patient advocates and MyHealthVet coordinators have stopped providing face-to-face services, but are available virtually. Veterans are welcome to call the Veterans Experience Call Center at 702-791-9000 ext. 15436 to obtain assistance, or contact patient advocates or coordinators via MyHealthVet secure messaging.

(NEW) Facility Revenue closed for in-person visits

Due to COVID-19, the VA Facility Revenue Office located at the North Las Vegas VA Medical Center is closed to face-to-face visits, but available by phone. To make a payment, Veterans should call 1-888-827-4817 or visit www.pay.gov. For questions about a bill or to set up a payment plan, Veterans should call 1-866-347-2353 or 808-538-2530.

(NEW) VASNHS closes in-person enrollment, encourages virtual options

Due to COVID-19, face-to-face services at the VASNHS Enrollment Office have been suspended. VASNHS is encouraging Veterans who have not accessed care with the VA to enroll virtually at www.va.gov, or call the Health Eligibility Center at 877-222-8387. If a Veteran is currently enrolled at another VA location and would like to transfer to the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System, they can call the enrollment office at 702-791-9071 between 7:30 a.m. and 4 p.m. Monday-Friday.

(NEW) Appointment reminders temporarily discontinued

To avoid confusion regarding cancellations of upcoming face-to-face appointments, VASNHS is temporarily discontinuing automated appointment reminder telephone calls and postcards.

VASNHS staff are currently reaching out to Veterans to talk to them about available options for their scheduled appointments. To check on future scheduled appointments or to cancel an appointment, Veterans can call VASNHS' automated telephone system at 702-791-9000, press 2, then press 1.

(NEW) Nellis Air Force Base COVID-19 information

Our Joint Venture partners at Nellis Air Force Base have made adjustments to services in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. To help servicemembers, families and other patrons better navigate currently available services on the base, they have created a [quick-reference list](#). While these are the current hours and services available, please keep in mind that this information may change, so it's best to call ahead before planning a trip to the installation. Visitors may also visit www.nellis.af.mil/COVID-19 for the latest information.

***Note:** Due to COVID-19, the base is not currently processing new base passes at this time for Veterans with a service connection who were recently approved to use the base commissary, exchange and MWR activities.*

No-Visitor Policy

Effective immediately VASNHS will implement a "No Visitor" policy, meaning the public and outside visitors will not be permitted to see inpatients at the North Las Vegas Medical Center or accompany Veterans to outpatient appointments at any of VASNHS' community clinics, unless they are directly assisting or caring for a Veteran.

- The only exceptions will be in compassionate cases, when Veterans are in their last stages of life and receiving palliative or hospice care.
- In those cases, visitors will be limited to a specific Veteran's room only.

Cancellation of Elective Surgeries and Non-Urgent Procedures

VASNHS will cease elective surgeries and other non-urgent procedures no later than Wednesday, March 18. This action is being taken to reduce unnecessary hospitalizations and ICU use, freeing

up critical resources to specifically address COVID-19. All patients who fall into these categories will be contacted by the facility.

Cancellation of in-person group sessions, classes and courses

VASNHS is canceling all in-person group sessions, classes and courses throughout the healthcare system until further notice. Virtual options such as telehealth and conference calls will be offered as alternatives wherever possible for Veterans participating in these activities. VASNHS will reach out to affected individuals to discuss options.

Fisher House Closure

VASNHS will be closing the VA Southern Nevada Fisher House until further notice. VASNHS Fisher House staff will notify and work with affected individuals and other families requesting temporary lodging to make new arrangements.

Valet Parking Services Suspended

VASNHS has suspended valet parking service at North Las Vegas VA Medical Center until further notice.

Postponed Events

The Department of Veterans Affairs is postponing several local upcoming public events including:

- **March 21** - Women's History Month High Tea, Three Square Food Bank. **UPDATE: Canceled for 2020.**
- **March 29** - National Vietnam War Veterans Day. **Status:** *Formal ceremonies and events have been canceled for 2020. Vietnam-era Veterans interested in receiving a commemorative 50th anniversary pin, should contact vhalaspao@va.gov.*
- **April 1** - Henderson Vet Center 10-Year Anniversary Celebration. **Status:** *Tentatively rescheduled for Fall of 2020.*
- **April 4** – Southern Nevada Veterans Community Engagement Board Health and Wellness Fair and VA Veterans Town Hall, North Las Vegas VA Medical Center. **Status:** *Will be rescheduled for September or October 2020.*

In addition to local VA events, the VA will cease participation in all public outreach events until April 30. VASNHS will provide updates and more information on each postponed event as it becomes available. We apologize for any inconvenience. There have been no cancellations of VA medical appointments and all VA operations continue to function as normal.

General Information

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a novel (new) coronavirus that was first detected in China and which has now been detected in more than 100 locations internationally, including in the United States. The virus has been named "SARS-CoV-2" and the disease it causes has been named "coronavirus disease 2019" (abbreviated "COVID-19").

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.

- People are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest).
- Some spread might be possible before people show symptoms; there have been reports of this occurring with this new coronavirus, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

Reported illnesses have ranged from mild symptoms to severe illness and death for confirmed coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) cases.

The following symptoms may appear **2-14 days after exposure.***

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

(Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

How to protect yourself

Currently, there is no vaccine to prevent the COVID-19 infection and no medication to treat it. CDC believes symptoms appear 2 to 14 days after exposure. Avoid exposure and avoid exposing others to an infection with these simple steps.

- Learn to use VA Video Connect through the [VA mobile app store](#) or by contacting your VA care team, before any urgent problems arise.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. An easy way to mark the time is to hum the “Happy Birthday” song from beginning to end twice while scrubbing.
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick or becoming sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue (not your hands) and throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Getting a flu shot is recommended.

High Risk Individuals

Early information out of China, where COVID-19 first started, shows that some people are at higher risk of getting very sick from this illness. This includes:

- **Older adults**
- **People who have serious chronic medical conditions** like:
 - Heart disease
 - Diabetes
 - Lung disease

If you are at higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19 because of your age or because you have a serious long-term health problem, it is extra important for you to take actions to reduce your risk of getting sick with the disease.

- Stock up on supplies.
- **Take everyday precautions** to keep space between yourself and others.
- When you go out in public, keep away from others who are sick, limit close contact and wash your hands often.
- **Avoid crowds** as much as possible.
- **Avoid cruise travel** and non-essential air travel.
- **During a COVID-19 outbreak in your community, stay home** as much as possible to further reduce your risk of being exposed.

Additional Resources

For more information on COVID-19, please visit the following sites:

[White House Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) web page](#)
[CDC Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) web page](#)
[VA Public Health COVID-19 Public Health Page](#)
[Nevada Health Response](#)
[Southern Nevada Health District](#)
[Clark County COVID-19 Page](#)