

NEWS RELEASE

VA Sunshine Healthcare Network (VISN 8)



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – March 17, 2020 | VISN 8 Office of Communication & Stakeholder Relations | VISN8CommunicationOffice@va.gov

VA Medical Facilities in Florida, South Georgia, and the Caribbean Taking Additional Precautions for COVID-19

ST. PETERSBURG, FL – The VA Sunshine Healthcare Network (VISN 8) is taking additional steps to slow the spread of COVID-19 to protect healthcare system’s capabilities, healthcare workers and Veterans. Facilities within the VISN 8 Network include the [Bay Pines VA Healthcare System](#), [James A. Haley Veterans’ Hospital and Clinics](#), [Miami VA Healthcare System](#), [North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System](#), [Orlando VA Healthcare System](#), [VA Caribbean Healthcare System](#), and the [West Palm Beach VA Medical Center](#)

These actions include:

- VISN 8 facilities are transitioning to virtual appointments to the fullest extent to allow Veterans to stay at home, avoid exposure to others and reduce their risk; Veterans with appointments will be contacted several days beforehand to discuss virtual appointment options available to them.
 - Veterans can help with this transition by visiting the VA Video On-Demand webpage for more information: <https://mobile.va.gov/content/getting-started-0>.
 - Veterans enrolled for care within VISN 8 can continue to use the [VISN 8 Clinical Contact Center](#) for 24/7 virtual urgent care by calling 1-877-741-3400 (toll free) or by using the [VA Health Chat App](#). Veterans who are concerned they may have symptoms of Coronavirus, flu or cold should contact the center first before coming to a VA facility.
- VISN 8 facilities will cease non-urgent elective procedures. Any impacted Veterans will be contacted directly by their health care team to reschedule. Urgent and emergent elective procedures will continue during this period.
- VISN 8 facilities are further restricting visitations. Only one visitor will be permitted per Veteran if required to provide assistance moving a patient to and from an appointment, providing support to an inpatient in a palliative or hospice care unit, or for Veterans who have major procedures. Visitors who screen positive will not be granted access to the medical centers.

These newly announced actions do not supersede or replace activities announced by VISN 8 last week. All VISN 8 facilities continue to use mandatory and enhanced screening protocols for all patients, employees, and visitors, have restricted visitations to certain units, and have taken many other actions to mitigate the infection and spread of the virus. For facility-specific status updates, please visit the appropriate healthcare system website (linked above).

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U.S. COVID-19 testing capacity is rapidly increasing. When VA identifies patients, who meet the CDC criteria for COVID-19 risk and symptoms, we coordinate that testing with Departments of Health, VA Public Health Laboratory in Palo Alto, CA and commercial labs in Florida/South Georgia and the Caribbean. Learn more about what CDC says about symptoms and testing at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html.

Everyone must help slow the spread of this disease by practicing social distancing. Actions include:

- Plan home entertainment that limits contact with others.
- Avoid public gatherings such as movies, concerts, and church or community meetings when possible.
- Shop at non-peak times. Take advantage of curbside pick-up or home deliveries, if available.
- Avoid public transportation or travel unless essential; travel during off-peak times.
- Stay home if you are sick, unless seeking medical treatment.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue and throw away immediately.
- Clean your hands frequently.
- Clean hard surfaces with disinfectant.
- Stay six feet from others when possible.

VISN 8 understands these actions may be inconvenient to some, however, these critical measures will help protect those who trust VA for their care and the employees that provide that care.

Important Websites:

- VA Public Health – www.publichealth.va.gov/n-coronavirus/index.asp
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html
- Florida Department of Health – www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/COVID-19/covid19-toolkit.html



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