



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System
Providing World Class Care and Service to America's Heroes

In Reply Refer to:

March 26, 2020

Dear Veteran,

Our primary mission at VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System (VASNHCS) remains to provide safe health care to you. As you are aware, COVID-19 is spreading throughout our community, and we're all being asked to practice social distancing and adjust our daily routines to minimize the spread of the virus. Accordingly, we have implemented significant changes to our operations that impact how you access our services.

We continue to take proactive steps to provide the safest care to you while shifting resources and employing new strategies to limit the transmission of COVID-19. These steps include limiting access to our facilities, screening everyone who enters, and expanding our ability to deliver continued care to you through VA's telehealth, telephone, MyHealthVet and other virtual care options. Additionally, we are regularly assessing supplies to ensure we are prepared and equipped to meet any contingency.

VASNHCS is taking these steps to ensure the health and safety of Veterans and staff. As part of this process, I have made the following operational and physical access changes to all our sites of care.

Hospital Entrances:

All staff and Veterans enter the hospital through the Main/Front entrance located on Kirman Avenue during normal business hours, 6am to 5pm, Monday through Friday.

A clinical screener is stationed at the Emergency Department (ED) entrance and will allow patients with urgent/emergent healthcare needs to enter through the ED. Only Veterans being seen in the ED will be permitted access to that entrance.

The Specialty Clinic entrance is closed until further notice. We will have staff available to assist with escorting patients safely to and from their specialty care appointments.

During off hours and weekends, access to the hospital will be available only through the ED entrance. All other hospital entrance doors are to remain locked.

Screening

Everyone who enters any VASNHCS facility will be pre-screened for the following conditions:

- Fever
- New or worsening cough
- Shortness of breath

Veterans coming for appointments are often accompanied by someone. Attendants and escorts are generally not permitted, except as necessary for clinical care, major procedures, or support of a disability.

Visitation

To protect patients and staff, inpatient visitation is not permitted (some exceptions for hospice or extenuating circumstances may be permitted). Nobody under the age of 18 will be permitted.

Non-Urgent Procedures, Surgery and Dental

We have canceled non-urgent elective surgeries and procedures. This includes dental and many departments throughout our healthcare system. We encourage the use of telephone and video connect appointments to the extent possible.

CBOCs, Eye Clinic, Dental Clinic Operations

Effective Friday, March 27, we will predominately close the CBOCs and Eye Clinic operations, with a few exceptions. We are currently converting in-person appointments to video/telephone appointments. Dental Clinic is providing urgent/emergent care only.

Supplies

Health care systems across the nation are facing critical shortages of face masks, gloves, and isopropyl alcohol. As a result, except in critical cases, we are limiting the use of gloves, masks, and isopropyl alcohol in the outpatient setting. This decision was not made without considerable input from Pharmacy Service and Infectious Disease experts in our network. This will allow any remaining and future supply of gloves, masks, and isopropyl alcohol to be used for seriously ill veterans.

Stay home and phone

If you have symptoms of fever, cough, and shortness of breath, please call the VASNHCS Call Center at 888-838-6256 and select the option to speak to a nurse before visiting the facility (if you need an ambulance or need emergency room care, call 911 or go to your nearest ER). Tell them about your symptoms.

In addition to calling first, consider using VA's telehealth, MyHealthVet and virtual care options. VA's telehealth providers can evaluate your symptoms and provide a diagnosis and comprehensive care, so you do not have to leave your home or office.

Dealing with Stress

It's important during these times of social isolation and distancing that we remember to take care of ourselves and each other. Below are some resources for managing stress in times of turmoil.

Crisis Support Services of NV
Veteran Crisis Line

1-800-273-8255 or text CARE to 839863
1-800-273-8255, press 1; Text 838255;
confidential chat: www.veteranscrisisline.net

Additionally, you can access any of the resources directly below:

My HealtheVet	https://myhealth.va.gov
Nevada Unemployment Insurance	http://ui.nv.gov/css.html
Federal Trade Commission Consumer Resources	https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/
IRS Tax Filing Information	https://www.irs.gov/coronavirus
Nevada Health Response	https://nvhealthresponse.nv.gov/
Nevada Health Link	https://www.nevadahealthlink.com/

I urge you to stay informed and up to date on the coronavirus by going to the following websites:

VASNHCS:	https://reno.va.gov
VHA Internet:	https://www.publichealth.va.gov
CDC Internet:	https://www.cdc.gov

Our leadership team is meeting twice daily as part of incident command operations. We are standing up additional ICU beds with ventilator capability, as well as a larger screening tent, to handle any increase in needs. I'll keep you posted as we operationalize additional capability to adjust to the needs of our Veteran community.

This is a rapidly evolving situation in the United States, and of course VA's response adjusts as the situation warrants. Our goal remains to provide you timely and safe medical care. These temporary changes are necessary to protect Veterans, staff, and our mission in the face of COVID-19. I realize these changes are significant, and I appreciate your understanding and cooperation. You are our priority, and we'll do our best to balance the many needs and competing interests during this very stressful time. You are in our hearts.

Lisa Howard
Director