

St. Cloud VA

UPDATE

August 18, 2021



A monthly newsletter for Veterans served by the St. Cloud VA Health Care System, and for those who serve them. Send news items and comments to St. Cloud VA Health Care System, Attn: Public Affairs Officer, 4801 Veterans Drive, St. Cloud, MN 56303, or via email to barry.venable@va.gov

Third COVID-19 vaccine doses for immune compromised individuals

On Thursday, August 12, 2021, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [authorized](#) a third dose of COVID-19 vaccine for people with moderate to severe immunocompromise who received the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccines. This includes those with organ transplants and those diagnosed with conditions that are considered to have a similar level of immunocompromise. Additional doses are not recommended for other people at this time.



People with significant immunocompromise are at increased risk of poor outcomes from COVID-19. There is data that suggests an additional COVID-19 vaccine dose enhances antibody responses to the COVID-19 vaccine. There are studies that indicate a reduced antibody response in immunocompromised people after they have been fully vaccinated, compared to healthy vaccine recipients.

St. Cloud VA HCS patients who are immune compromised should consult with their primary care teams for advice and assistance on the recommended additional vaccine dose.

Individuals that are immune compromised are people with medical conditions or people receiving treatments that are associated with moderate to severe immune compromise, such as the following:

- Active or recent treatment for solid tumor and hematologic malignancies (currently getting treatment, such as chemotherapy, for cancer)
- Receipt of solid-organ transplant and taking immunosuppressive therapy

- Receipt of CAR-T-cell or hematopoietic stem cell transplant (within 2 years of transplantation or taking immunosuppression therapy)
- Moderate or severe primary immunodeficiency (these would be diagnosed by your medical team and often are conditions someone is born with - for example, DiGeorge, Wiskott-Aldrich syndromes)
- Advanced or untreated HIV infection (people with HIV who are not on treatment or who have a low CD4 count)
- Actively getting treatment with
 - high-dose corticosteroids (high dose is ≥ 20 mg prednisone or equivalent per day)
 - alkylating agents
 - antimetabolites
 - transplant-related immunosuppressive drugs
 - cancer chemotherapeutic agents classified as severely immunosuppressive
 - TNF blockers
 - other biologic agents that are immunosuppressive or immunomodulatory

Note – this list is not exhaustive, and your clinical care team is best able to tell you if you have immune compromise that is like what is listed above.

The CDC and FDA recommend the additional dose be of the same type, dose, and manufacturer as your initial vaccine series. This means that, if indicated, individuals who received a Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine should receive a third dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine; and

individuals who received the Moderna vaccine should receive a third dose of the Moderna vaccine. CDC and FDA recommend a minimum interval of 28 days after receiving the initial vaccine series to receive an additional shot.

Due to insufficient data, the EUA amendment for an additional dose does not apply to Janssen COVID-19 vaccine or to individuals who received Janssen COVID-19 as a primary series. CDC and FDA are actively engaged to ensure that immunocompromised recipients of Janssen COVID-19 vaccine have optimal vaccine protection.

Other fully vaccinated individuals do not need an additional dose right now. The need for and timing of COVID-19 additional doses for the rest of the population have not been established.

The FDA, CDC, and National Institute of Health (NIH) are engaged in a science-based, rigorous process to consider whether or when an additional dose might be necessary for the remaining population. Those organizations will continue to review any new data as it becomes available and will keep the public informed. However, no additional doses are recommended at this time.

Individuals who have received Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccines from VHA through the authority of the SAVE LIVES Act and have moderate to severe immune compromise can receive your third dose through VHA.

9/11: 20th Anniversary

The events of September 11, 2001 called brave men and women to serve their country in the Armed Forces. VA remembers your service and your sacrifices. Our Post-9/11 Veterans team is here to help you navigate VA services and support you through your transition to civilian life and beyond. Connect with us at (320) 252-1670 Ext. 6546 or visit <https://www.va.gov/st-cloud-health-care/health-services/returning-service-member-care/>. #VARemembers911



On the 20th anniversary of 9/11, our nation comes together to honor the nearly 3,000 lives lost, and to pay tribute to the humanity and heroism we saw in the days that followed. VA remembers those we lost, those injured, and those who responded.

We know this day of remembrance can be difficult for many Veterans. VA remains here for you — reach out to the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 available 24/7 for confidential, caring support.

#VARemembers911

<https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>

Veterans Crisis Line Yard Signs Available for Distribution

September is Suicide Prevention Month and increasing awareness of the Veterans Crisis Line saves lives.

This September, Veterans, community groups and individuals are invited to increase awareness of the Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) among Veterans by helping to place 1,000 VCL yard signs across Central Minnesota.

Participants are asked to distribute a minimum of 5 VCL yard signs and individuals receiving signs are asked to commit to keeping the signs in yards for as long as possible. Larger quantities are available upon request.



To order the free signs for your organization simply contact the St. Cloud VA's Suicide Prevention Team at 320-252-1670 Ext. 6719 or fax the order form at the end of this edition to 320-255-6389. Order forms are also available at: <https://www.va.gov/st-cloud-health-care/stories/>

Those submitting orders by August 20 can pick them up from the VA Medical Center in St. Cloud and VA clinics in Alexandria, Brainerd, and Montevideo the week of Aug. 23-27. Here is the pick-up schedule:

- St. Cloud VA Medical Center, Bldg. 111, Aug. 24, 1 to 3 p.m.
- Max J. Beilke VA Clinic, Aug. 25, 1 to 3 p.m.
- Brainerd VA Clinic, Aug. 26, 1 to 3 p.m.
- Montevideo VA Clinic, Aug. 27, 1 to 3 p.m.

Those who cannot order by August 20 may use the same ordering information and make individual arrangements for later pick-up.

The Veterans Crisis Line is a free, confidential resource available to any Veteran, even if they are not enrolled in VA health care or registered with VA. Care does not end when the conversation is over. The Veterans Crisis Line can connect Veterans to their local suicide prevention coordinators (SPC), who follow up to coordinate care. Veterans in crisis or anyone who is concerned about a Veteran can reach caring, qualified VA responders standing by to help 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by calling [1-800-273-8255](tel:1-800-273-8255) and Press 1.

Since its launch in 2007, the Veterans Crisis Line has answered more than 5.4 million calls and initiated the dispatch of emergency services to callers in crisis more than 184,000 times. The Veterans Crisis Line anonymous online chat service, added in 2009, has engaged in more than 630,000 chats. In November 2011, the Veterans Crisis Line introduced a text-messaging service to provide another way for Veterans to connect with confidential, round-the-clock support and since then has responded to more than 204,000 texts.

Afghanistan: Let's Talk About It

Veterans from all eras are reacting to the events in Afghanistan, such as the U.S withdrawal and the takeover by the Taliban.

Veterans may question the meaning of their service or whether it was worth the sacrifices they made. They may feel more moral distress about experiences they had during their service. **It's normal to feel this way.** Talk with your friends and families, reach out to battle buddies, connect with a peer-to-peer network, or sign up for mental health services. Scroll down for a list common reactions and coping advice.



Resources available right now.

- **Veterans Crisis Line** - *If you are having thoughts of suicide, call [1-800-273-8255](tel:1-800-273-8255), then PRESS 1 or visit <http://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>*
- **Vet Centers** - *Discuss how you feel with other Veterans in these community-based counseling centers. **70% of Vet Center staff are Veterans.** Call [1-877-927-8387](tel:1-877-927-8387) or find one [near you](#).*

- [VA Mental Health Services Guide](#) - *This guide will help you sign up and access mental health services.*
- [MakeTheConnection.net](#) - *information, resources, and Veteran to Veteran videos for challenging life events and experiences with mental health issues.*
- [Download VA's self-help apps](#) - Tools to help deal with common reactions like, stress, sadness, and anxiety. You can also track your symptoms over time.
- **VA Women Veterans Call Center** - Call or text [1-855-829-6636](#) (M-F 8 a.m. – 10 p.m. & SAT 8 a.m. - 6:30 p.m. ET)
- **VA Caregiver Support Line** - Call [1-855-260-3274](#) (M-F 8 a.m. – 10 p.m. & SAT 8 a.m.- 5 p.m. ET)

Common Reactions

In reaction to current events in Afghanistan, Veterans may:

- Feel frustrated, sad, helpless, grief or distressed
- Feel angry or betrayed
- Experience an increase in mental health symptoms like symptoms of PTSD or depression
- Sleep poorly, drink more or use more drugs
- Try to avoid all reminders or media or shy away from social situations

- Have more military and homecoming memories

Veterans may question the meaning of their service or whether it was worth the sacrifices they made. They may feel more moral distress about experiences they had during their service.

Veterans may feel like they need to expect and/or prepare for the worst. For example, they may:

- Become overly protective, vigilant, and guarded
- Become preoccupied by danger
- Feel a need to avoid being shocked by, or unprepared for, what may happen in the future

Feeling distress is a normal reaction to negative events, especially ones that feel personal. It can be helpful to let yourself feel those feelings rather than try to avoid them. Often, these feelings will naturally run their course. If they continue without easing up or if you feel overwhelmed by them, the suggestions below can be helpful.

Strategies for Managing Ongoing Distress

At this moment, it may seem like all is lost, like your service or your sacrifices were for nothing. Consider the ways that your service made a difference, the

impact it had on others' lives or on your own life. Remember that now is just one moment in time and that things will continue to change.

It can be helpful to focus on the present and to engage in the activities that are most meaningful and valuable to you. Is there something you can do today that is important to you? This can be as an individual, a family member, a parent, or a community member. Something that is meaningful to you about your work or your spirituality? Such activities won't change the past or the things you can't control, but they can help life feel meaningful and reduce distress, despite the things you cannot change.

It can also help to consider your thinking. Ask yourself if your thoughts are helpful to you right now. Are there ways you can change your thinking to be more accurate and less distressing? For example, are you using extreme thinking where you see the situation as all bad or all good? If so, try and think in less extreme terms. For example, rather than thinking "my service in Afghanistan was useless" consider instead "I helped keep Afghanistan safe."

Finally, consider more general coping strategies that you may want to try including:

Engage in Positive Activities. Try to engage in positive, healthy, or meaningful activities, even if they are small, simple actions. Doing things that are rewarding, meaningful, or enjoyable, even if you don't feel like it, can make you feel better.

Stay Connected. Spend time with people who give you a sense of security, calm, or happiness, or those who best understand what you are going through.

Practice Good Self Care. Look for positive coping strategies that help you manage your emotions. Listening to music, exercising, practicing breathing routines, spending time in nature or with animals, journaling, or reading inspirational text are some simple ways to help manage overwhelming or distressing emotions.

Stick to Your Routines. It can be helpful to stick to a schedule for when you sleep, eat, work, and do other day-to-day activities.

Limit Media Exposure. Limit how much news you take in if media coverage is increasing your distress.

Use a mobile app. Consider one of VA's self-help apps (see <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/app/vid/mobile/>) such as PTSD Coach

which has tools that can help you deal with common reactions like, stress, sadness, and anxiety. You can also track your symptoms over time.

[PTSD Coach Online](#). A series of online video coaches will guide you through 17 tools to help you manage stress. PTSD Coach Online is used on a computer, rather than a mobile device, and therefore can offer tools that involve writing.

If you develop your own ways of adapting to ongoing events and situations, you may gain a stronger sense of being able to deal with challenges, a greater sense of meaning or purpose, and an ability to mentor and support others in similar situations

Play in the St. Cloud VA Games!

Veterans can participate in the 2021 VA Games virtually for the entire month of September!



This will be the 7th annual games the St. Cloud VA Health Care System has hosted. With another new event being added this year, the games offer 8 total fitness and sporting events promoting Veteran health and wellness.

Events include:

- 1 Mile run/walk/cycle/wheel
- Golf
- Disc Golf
- Billiards
- Rowing
- Ski Erg
- Hoop Shoot
- Horseshoes

With adaptive divisions in each event, every Veteran is welcome and encouraged to compete!

Registration packets are available at: <https://www.va.gov/st-cloud-health-care/programs/2021-va-games-registration-packet/>

Stay Healthy! Get recommended screenings and immunizations

Recommendations for preventive services depend on your age, sex, health status, and family history. Find out which screening tests and immunizations are recommended for you.



What's Important to Know?

It's important to keep up with your screening tests and immunizations to prevent certain kinds of illness.

Recommendations for preventive services depend on your age, sex, health status, and family history. Every person is different.

All preventive services have possible benefits (pros) and harms (cons).

Depending on your values and preferences about these benefits and harms, you may wish to receive additional, fewer, or different services than those that are recommended. Talk with your health care team about their recommendations for screening tests and immunizations that are right for you.

“Screening” means looking for a condition before there are any signs or symptoms of that condition. If you already have a symptom of the condition, you should talk with your provider about it, even if you

were recently screened and no problem was found.

Regardless of age, gender, health status and family history, you should be screened for alcohol abuse, depression, high blood pressure, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), military sexual trauma, obesity, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and tobacco use.

You should also follow the appropriate cancer screening guidelines. Keeping up with immunizations is also important to stay healthy. You should receive a flu shot every year and a tetanus shot once every 10 years.

If you have not received a COVID-19 vaccine already, you can best protect yourself by doing so now. COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective in preventing serious illness from COVID-19. They will also protect you from newer virus variants that may spread more easily and affect you more severely. COVID-19 vaccines may be given at the same time as other vaccines, including influenza vaccines. Vaccination is the best way to protect yourself, your family, and your community.

Want to Know More?

If you want to learn more about getting recommended screening tests and immunizations, talk with your VA health care team. They can also help if you have questions about making a healthy living change.

Just launched: All-new St. Cloud VA website

Great news! St. Cloud VA has just launched a new website that gives you better service and an easier online experience.

Veterans, families, and caregivers have told us that VA medical center websites are confusing to navigate, contain outdated or missing information and do not match their VA health care journey.

We listened.

To better meet the needs of Veterans, families and caregivers, VA has built all-new websites for medical centers and related health care facilities. We have used your feedback to develop a website that provides everything Veterans, families and caregivers need to prepare for a visit, get care and connect with your VA health care team:

- Directions to main VAMCs and associated clinics
- Phone numbers
- Parking and transportation information
- Hospital and clinic hours
- Patient registration
- Making appointments and refilling prescriptions

You will find a new complete list of VA health services, social programs, and care coordinators, including:

- Primary and specialty care
- Mental health care
- Caregiver support and care coordinators for women Veterans, LGBTQ Veterans, returning service members and more

We have built a mobile-first user experience that gets you to all content and tools in just one or two clicks, including:

- Online scheduling, prescription refills and access to medical records
- A new list of health services that uses Veteran-friendly names and descriptions
- New social and health program pages that make it easier to connect Veterans and their caregivers with care coordinators to help them with their health care journey
- Increased speed and mobile features that allow users to call VA or get driving directions with a single click

[Click here](#) to visit St. Cloud VA's new website. The old website is no longer functional, and you will automatically be directed to the new site. It's all part of our continuing work to improve the Veteran experience.

Here is the new URL to bookmark:

<https://www.va.gov/st-cloud-health-care/>

To learn more, watch [this video](#) about the new VAMC websites.

Beneficiary Travel Update:

We apologize, but walk-in customer service hours are from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Aug. 5 through Sept. 17.

Normal walk in hours (8:30 a.m.-2 p.m.) are planned to resume Monday, Sept. 18. Veterans needing to request travel reimbursement can use one of the following options:

1--The VetLink service kiosks located in the Beneficiary Travel (Bldg. 5) waiting area or near the Bldg. 1 information desk.

2--Request and/or track reimbursement online through the Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System (BTSSS), a secure web-based portal available 24/7, 365 days a year!

- Veterans can log in to BTSSS with their MyHealthVet log in or set up a DS Logon account issued by the Department of Defense. A DS Logon is an electronic ID issued by DoD that enables Veterans and caregivers access to many DoD and VA sites with one user username and password.
- To submit a claim and/or register for a DS Logon, visit: <https://eauth.va.gov/accessva/> and choose the appropriate option, then travel claim entry.

3--Veterans may also complete a paper request on [VA Form 10-3542](#), Veteran Beneficiary Claim for Reimbursement of Travel Expenses, available in the B5 lobby or at the information desk in B1, and place it in the locked drop box to the right of the Beneficiary Travel window or at the information desk.

Contact the Beneficiary Travel Department at 320-252-1670 Ext. 6442 with questions.

Help us recognize our wonderful nurses



The DAISY Award is an international program that rewards and celebrates the extraordinary clinical skill and compassionate care given by nurses every day. Click on [DAISY Award](#) for more information on the award.

St. Cloud VA Health Care System is proud to be a DAISY Award Partner, recognizing our selected nurses with this special honor six times a year. These nurses consistently demonstrate excellence through their clinical expertise and extraordinary compassionate care. They are recognized as outstanding role models in our nursing community.

These nurses' clinical skill and especially compassionate care exemplify the kind of nurse that patients, their families, and other staff recognize as an outstanding role model.

Who may be nominated?

- RNs
- LPNs/LVNs
- Advanced Practice Nurses

Who may nominate a nurse?

- Patients
- Patient families
- Visitors

Each DAISY Award recipient is recognized with a framed certificate, DAISY Pin and a hand-carved stone sculpture entitled “A Healer’s Touch.” Additionally, the recipient’s team receives cinnamon rolls – a favorite of Patrick’s during his illness.

Nominating a nurse

- Ask the nurse’s full name (you will need it when you fill out the nomination form)
- Email vhastcdaisynominee@va.gov to request a nomination form for the DAISY Award.

Watch the New VA Health Chat Video

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has released a new video resource for Veterans! The video spotlights the VA Health Chat app. The app enables Veterans to connect with VA staff members in real time from anywhere they can use an internet-connected device.

VA Health Chat is a convenient way to fit care into a busy schedule. The app is secure, requiring users to sign in with DS Logon Premium, ID.me, or My HealtheVet Premium account credentials. This video highlights several of the app’s main features and benefits. These include how Veterans can chat in real time with VA staff to receive medical advice for nonurgent health concerns, schedule a VA appointment, or refill VA prescriptions.

To watch and share the video, visit the [Veterans Health Administration’s YouTube channel](#).

VA Health Chat is available for download on the [VA App Store](#), [Apple App Store](#), [Google](#)

[Play](#) and through the [VA Launchpad for Veterans app](#). Check the facilities listed on the [VA Health Chat page](#) to see their operating hours and if VA Health Chat is available to you.



Crisis resources are always available for Veterans. The Veterans Crisis Line is a free, confidential resource that connects Veterans or their loved ones to a real person specially trained to support Veterans. **Call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, text to 838255, or chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/Chat), 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.** Veterans don’t have to be enrolled in VA health care or registered with VA to use the Veterans Crisis Line.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Caregivers FIRST

Thursday, August 19 11:30 a.m. 12:30 p.m.
Caregivers FIRST is a training program for friend or family Caregivers of Veterans with physical or cognitive impairments. Caregivers FIRST is a program designed to help Caregivers: learn new skills, practice positive self-care, connect with other Caregivers, navigate VA and other community resources. Classes to be held virtually. Please contact St. Cloud VA Caregiver Support 320-252-1670 Ext. 7283 to register.

2021 St. Cloud VA Games (Virtual)

Sept. 1 to 30
Registration and information packets available at www.va.gov/st-cloud-health-care/

Veterans Affairs Radio Show

Monday, Sept. 13 8:10-8:30 a.m.
KNSI AM 1450/FM 103.3

Voices for Veterans Radio Show

Wednesday, Sept. 15 8-8:30 a.m.
WJON AM 1240

Coffee Talk

Friday, Oct. 8 2-4 p.m.
St. Cloud VA, Bldg. 29, Rm. 20E, or virtually
Coffee Talks are informal conversations intended to provide Veterans an opportunity to have their questions about VA health care answered. To attend, call the Health Hub at 320-252-1670 ext. 7271 to reserve a spot! Limit 6 for in-person attendance, reservations are required. Not able to attend in person? A Call-in phone line is available: Call 1-833-558-0712 or Visit: www.tinyurl.com/svh2ymwr
Meeting ID: 1998080535
Password: 656Coffee%

Women Veteran Town Hall Meeting

Dec. 14 5 p.m.
For more information contact:
Amber Willert, Women Veterans Program Manager, 320-654-7656

For a complete Calendar of Events, go to www.va.gov/st-cloud-healthcare/events

Quick Reference Phone List

Main St. Cloud VA HCS Phone Number	320-252-1670 or 800-247-1739
TDD User	320-255-6450
Max J. Beilke VA Clinic, Alexandria	320-759-2640
Brainerd VA Clinic	218-855-1115
Montevideo VA Clinic	320-269-2222
Veterans Crisis Line	800-273-8255 Press 1
Homeless Veteran Hotline	877- 424-3838

Billing:

- VA Care 866-347-2352
- Care in the Community (non-VA care) 877-881-7618

Caregiver Support Team	Ext. 7283
Chaplain Service	Ext. 6386
Community Care Referrals	Ext. 6401
Discrimination Complaints	Ext. 6304
Eligibility	Ext. 6340
Nutrition Clinic	Ext. 6376
Transition & Care Management Program	Ext. 6453
Patient Advocate	Ext. 6353
Pharmacy Refill Line	855-560-1724
Privacy Officer	Ext. 6408
Public Affairs Office	Ext. 6353
Release of Information (Medical Records)	Ext. 6336
Transportation	Ext. 7622
TRICARE	844-866-9378
Voluntary Service	Ext. 6365
VA Police	Ext. 6355

Stay in Touch

Visit our Website: <https://www.va.gov/st-cloud-health-care/>

Like us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/StCloudVAHCS

Visit us on Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/stcloudvahcs/>

Sign up for our automated email service. Visit the St. Cloud VA Website at: <https://www.va.gov/st-cloud-health-care/> and scroll down to the Get updates from VA St Cloud health care in the grey box. Click on the options you wish and enter your email address and you will be signed up to receive email updates from these four options.

ORDER FORM



The weather-resistant corrugated plastic yard signs are approximately 18 inches tall by 24 inches wide and each come with a metal wire post.

YES, please sign us up for 5 signs!

Check here if your organization is interested in receiving additional quantities of signs if available

ORGANIZATION Name: _____

PHYSICAL ADDRESS: _____

POINT-OF-CONTACT NAME: _____

POINT-OF-CONTACT PHONE: _____

PICK-UP LOCATION: St. Cloud VAMC Max J. Beilke VA Clinic (Alexandria)

 Brainerd VA Clinic Montevideo VA Clinic

Our organization needs to make other pick-up arrangements.

Phone order in to 320-252-1670 ext. 6719 or fax the completed form to 320-255-6389.