

St. Cloud VA

UPDATE

October 22, 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

COVID-19 Vaccination Program Update

St. Cloud VA Soon to offer Booster Doses

Definition of Booster dose – a vaccine dose provided after a 2-dose series is completed to attempt to address the waning immunity from the original series.

On Oct. 21, 2021 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention approved booster doses for the Moderna and Janssen/Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccines in certain populations. The CDC had previously approved a Pfizer COVID vaccination booster dose, but the St. Cloud VA does not offer the Pfizer vaccine.

Planning is underway to safely offer booster doses to Veterans enrolled at the St. Cloud VA. Like the initial COVID-19 vaccination effort, we will notify Veterans of when and how they may choose to get a booster dose of the Moderna or Janssen/Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine as soon as the information is available.

CDC Recommendations for Booster Doses

For individuals who received a Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, the following groups are eligible for a booster shot at 6 months or more after their initial series:

- 65 years and older
- Age 18+ who live in [long-term care settings](#)
- Age 18+ who have [underlying medical conditions](#)
- Age 18+ who work or live in [high-risk settings](#)

For individual who got the Janssen/Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine, booster shots are also recommended for those who are 18 and older and who were vaccinated two or more months ago.

There are now booster recommendations for all three available COVID-19 vaccines in the United States. Eligible individuals may choose which vaccine they receive as a booster dose and CDC's recommendations now allow for this type of mix and match dosing for booster shots.

St. Cloud VA continues to offer third COVID-19 vaccine doses for immune compromised individuals

Definition of Third Dose for Immunocompromised – a vaccine dose provided after a 2-dose series is completed of either Moderna or Pfizer vaccine to an individual that is considered moderately-to-severely immunocompromised. The 3rd dose should be from the same manufacturer, and same dose, and should be at least 28 days after the 2nd dose. The CDC lists clinical conditions that meet the immunocompromised definition. The 3rd-dose is intended to improve the immune response since the standard 2-dose regimen is known to have a reduced effect in these individuals.

The St. Cloud VA HCS continues to offer additional (third) doses of Moderna COVID-19 vaccine to Veterans who have moderate to severe immune compromise.

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.

Third doses are recommended to be of the same type, dose, and manufacturer as your

initial vaccine series. CDC and FDA recommend a minimum interval of 28 days after receiving the initial vaccine series to receive an additional shot.

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 at VA.

St. Cloud VA continues to offer initial vaccines

The St. Cloud VA is providing the Moderna and Janssen/Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccines to all Veterans who have not yet been vaccinated.

How to get a COVID-19 vaccination at the St. Cloud VA

- With another appointment: Enrolled Veterans are offered or can request a vaccine for themselves and their spouse or caregiver when scheduling other appointments.
- Vaccine-only appointment: Enrolled Veterans desiring a vaccine-only appointment for themselves or their spouse or caregiver can call 320-252-1670, Ext. 6339.
- Not enrolled Vaccine-only appointment: Veterans not enrolled for VA care, their caregivers, and spouses, and CHAMPVA beneficiaries may use the Keep Me Informed tool at <https://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/> or call 320-252-1670, Ext. 6339

We recommend that everyone discusses the risks and benefits of vaccines with your medical provider and encourage everyone who can get a vaccine to do so—it's important for your health and well-being, and for your family and the community.

VA is resuming debt notification to Veterans effective Oct. 1, 2021.

If you owe money to VA for an overpayment related to Veterans benefits, or for medical care and pharmacy debt, here is what you need to know.

Benefit debt

VA automatically deferred collection on benefit debts created on or after April 6, 2020, through Sept. 30, 2021, to provide relief from the COVID-19 pandemic. Benefit debts created prior to April 6, 2020, had collection deferred upon request. VA also paused all collection activity on debts under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of the Treasury until Sept. 30, 2021.

Most VBA benefit debts are collected by the VA [Debt Management Center](#) (DMC). This includes debts for benefits, like compensation, pension, and education. If VBA created a debt for you while collection was deferred, you likely received informational letters from DMC letting you know your debt existed, but you didn't need to act until after September 30 unless you chose to do so.

What's happening now

On Oct. 1, 2021, the DMC began sending debt notification letters, which include timelines for next steps. The letters will be sent in phases over a period of several months, so you may not receive your debt notification in October. If you requested DMC to temporarily stop your payment plan

due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it will not automatically resume on Oct. 1, 2021.

Relief Options

If you are experiencing financial difficulty and can't repay your VA debt right away, there are a variety of relief options available, including:

- Extending repayment plans
- Requesting debt forgiveness through the waiver process
- Submitting a compromise offer to settle the debt for less than the full amount
- Requesting a temporary hardship suspension of repayment until September 30, 2022

What happens if you don't contact DMC when you receive your debt notice?

If you are receiving VA benefits, VA will withhold money from your benefit payments to pay an outstanding debt. It is important to contact DMC once you receive your debt notification letter if the amount VA is proposing to withhold from your benefits doesn't work for you.

Eventually, unpaid debts can become delinquent and subject to referral to the Department of the Treasury and/or Credit Reporting Agencies. Currently, DMC is continuing to pause new benefit debt referrals to the Department of Treasury or Credit Reporting Agencies to make sure Veterans have plenty of time to make payment arrangements or request relief. For any debts that were already referred before the pandemic, Treasury is resuming collection activities beginning Oct. 1, 2021.

Contact Info

If you need assistance with options for your VBA benefit debt, call the DMC at 1-800-827-0648 or submit your request online at <https://iris.custhelp.va.gov/app/ask/>.

Veterans can also access benefit debt information, such as balance and debt letters at <https://www.va.gov/manage-va-debt>.

Medical care and pharmacy debt

The American Rescue Plan, passed in March 2021, included a provision that canceled copayments for medical care and pharmacy services received April 6, 2020 through Sept. 30, 2021, and directed refunds to be issued.

To date, VA has canceled \$880 million in copayments for over 2.4 million Veterans, issuing over \$240 million in refunds to 1.5 million Veterans who made payments on charges established prior to the passing of the American Rescue Plan.

Collection of copayments for medical care and pharmacy services will resume on Oct. 1, 2021. October 2021 statements will show charges incurred for medical care and pharmacy services provided prior to April 6, 2020 and on or after Oct. 1, 2021. VA staff has completed copayment refunds for care provided April 6, 2020 to Sept. 30, 2021. VHA began sending statements for information only in July 2021 to keep Veterans informed of balances owed. Debt relief options such as repayment plans, waivers and compromises are available. Veterans can [click here](#) for information or call 866-400-1238, Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – 8 p.m. ET to learn more. Patient statements can be viewed online: <https://eauth.va.gov/accessva/>

VEText is teaming up with the St. Cloud VA Pharmacy to provide text messages for prescription shipments

Starting Nov. 1, the St. Cloud VA Pharmacy is teaming with VEText, VA's text messaging notification service, to provide prescription shipment notifications for medications shipped directly from the St. Cloud VA Pharmacy. Every enrolled Veteran with a cell phone number listed in their health record is automatically enrolled in the VEText program, which also provides appointment reminders. To opt-out, simply reply "STOP" to the text message. If you want to restart the text message appointment reminders at any time, simply text "START" to a previous text message from VEText, and the service will resume.

Text shipment notifications!

Starting Nov. 1, the St. Cloud VA offers text message notifications for locally mailed prescriptions.

For VEText questions contact
(320) 252-1670 x7271

VHA Innovators Network VEText

For more information on VEText, visit: <https://www.va.gov/health/VEText.asp>

The Caregiver Support Program and the VA Caregiver Center Present:



Are you a caregiver of a Veteran? Would you like to learn an ancient practice that promotes physical and mental wellbeing?

Join us for three, 1-hour virtual courses on the ancient art of qigong taught by a VA Caregiver Center Instructor.

Caregivers of Veterans who receive care from VA are invited to attend this FREE program. Caregiver must be enrolled in the Caregiver Support Program prior to attending. Talk with your local Caregiver Support Coordinator at 320-252-1670 Ext. 7283 to learn more and register to attend. Pre-Registration is required by Oct. 18.

Schedule of Classes:

Session One: Mon., Oct. 25, 9 - 10 a.m.
Session Two: Mon., Nov. 8, 9 - 10 a.m.
Session Three: Mon., Nov. 22, 9 - 10 a.m.

Technology for Healthy Caregiving Virtual Class

Caregiving can be a lonely job, but there are many virtual VA technology options that can make taking care of yourself and supporting your loved one easier. Join the St. Cloud VA Caregiver Support Program to learn about:

- ✓ VA smartphone apps such as the Virtual Hope Box, PTSD Family Coach and the Mindfulness Coach

- ✓ Caregiver Support Program virtual services such as Building Better Caregivers and Annie text messaging
- ✓ Caregiver Support telehealth groups
- ✓ And more!

November 5 from 10-11 a.m. the Caregiver Support Team will present a virtual class on all the options.

Please register for the class through this site:

<https://tinyurl.com/CSPTechnologyForCaregiving> or call the Caregiver Support Team at 320-252-1670 Ext. 7283.

Addressing adaptive equipment, transfer safety and fall prevention virtual class

Caregivers are critical partners in helping Veterans remain in their homes. This presentation by the Caregiver Support Program occupational therapist will provide caregivers and Veterans important information about strategies to help keep both Veterans and caregivers safe in their home environment, such as:

- ✓ Using adaptive equipment and tools to make activities safer and easier
- ✓ Helping Veterans with transitioning on/off surfaces due to movement challenges
- ✓ Preventing the risk of slips, trips and falls

November 29 from 2-3 p.m.

Please register for the WebEx class through this site:

<https://tinyurl.com/CSPHomeSafetyTips>

or call the Caregiver Support Team at 320-252-1670 Ext. 7283.

Veterans Town Hall scheduled on Nov. 9 for Veterans served by the Max J. Beilke VA Clinic in Alexandria



A Veterans town hall meeting focused on improving VA health care services and programs is scheduled on November 9, 2021 at 2 p.m., via Microsoft Teams, for Veterans served by the Max J. Beilke VA Clinic in Alexandria and the St. Cloud VA Health Care System.

The planned move of the Max J. Beilke VA Clinic to a new location in the summer of 2022 is among the topics to be addressed.

Microsoft Teams is a business communication platform used for conference calls. The Virtual Town hall meeting provides Veterans the chance to hear from and have concerns addressed by St. Cloud VA officials while observing social distancing guidelines.

Veterans can visit <https://rb.gy/rtjn8e> to attend the event.

Veterans may also call in (audio only) to listen to the meeting at 1-872-701-0185 and use access code 707477519#.

If using a smart phone to access the town hall meeting, please download the MS Teams application that is found in the application store on your smartphone. The application can be found by searching for Microsoft Teams. If using a computer, simply click the link provided and select "Watch on the web instead."

Women Veterans Town Hall



December 14, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.

Join this virtual meeting via MS Teams at:

<https://bit.ly/3iWwTx7>

Or dial in via phone at 1-872-701-0185,
Conference ID 558 427 71#



For more information contact:
Amber Willert
Women Veterans Program Manager
320-654-7656



The Women Veterans Program Manager invites all women Veterans to join us for the Women Veterans Town Hall meeting on Dec. 14, 2021 at 5 p.m. to learn and discuss various programs for women Veterans.

This meeting will use the communication platform of Microsoft Teams programs:

<https://bit.ly/3iWwTx7> Click this link to join the meeting.

For more information contact Amber Willert at Amber.Willert@va.gov or 320-654-7656.

Attend a Coffee Talk

Coffee Talks



Topics to be covered:

- Enroll for health care
- VA health care benefits
- Using VA health services
- VA wellness programs
- Get started on your Whole Health journey

Not enrolled?

- Learn how to apply for VA health care.
- Bring your DD214!

Oct. 8, Nov. 12 & Dec. 10
2021

2—4 p.m.

St. Cloud VAMC

Bldg. 29 Rm. 20E

To attend in-person 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 website: tinyurl.com/svh2ymwr

Meeting ID: 1998080535

Password: 656Coffee%



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%

UPCOMING EVENTS

Qigong Class

Monday, Oct. 25 9-10 a.m.

Veterans Affairs Radio Show

Monday, Nov. 8:10-8:30 a.m.

KNSI AM 1450/FM 103.3

Caregiver Technology Class

Friday, Nov. 5 9-10 a.m.

Qigong Class

Monday, Nov. 8 9-10 a.m.

Veterans Town Hall

Tuesday, Nov. 9 2-3 p.m.

Coffee Talk

Friday, Nov. 12 2-4 p.m.

Voices for Veterans Radio Show

Wednesday, Nov. 17 8 – 8:30 a.m.

WJON AM 1240/FM 93.5

Qigong Class

Monday, Nov. 22 9-10 a.m.

Caregiver Adaptive Equipment & Safety Class

Monday, Nov. 29 2-3 p.m.

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.