COVID Vaccine Status Update

All Veterans enrolled for health care at VA San Diego are eligible to receive COVID-19 vaccinations and may schedule appointments using VA’s online appointment scheduling tool at VA.gov or by calling our COVID-19 vaccine scheduling line at (858) 642-3810. Please be aware our call center is experiencing a significantly higher call volume than usual, which is resulting in longer than normal hold times. When the system reaches capacity, you will receive a message asking you to call back later. We sincerely apologize for this inconvenience and ask that patients use VA’s online appointment scheduling tool whenever possible.

Also, in accordance with the SAVE LIVES Act, we are vaccinating unenrolled eligible Veterans, Veterans’ spouses, Veterans’ caregivers and CHAMPVA recipients. Individuals in these groups must be registered with the VA before receiving vaccinations and may do so by visiting the sign-up page at VA.gov. Once registered, please allow one business day before contacting us to schedule your vaccine appointment.

COVID-19 vaccines may be available at non-VA sites and are generally without cost to the recipient. However, please note, because 2nd dose vaccines are being sent to the same location as where each person gets their 1st dose, you must get your 2nd dose from the same source as your 1st (except under very rare circumstances and prior approval). This will ensure 2nd dose vaccines are available for Veterans who were previously vaccinated at the VA San Diego Healthcare System. If you received your vaccination at a non-VA site, please let your VA primary care team know by sending them a photo of your COVID-19 Vaccination Record Card as an attachment via My HealtheVet secure messaging.

We are administering vaccinations at our La Jolla medical center, and at our Mission Valley and Oceanside clinics. Patients must have scheduled COVID-19 vaccine appointments to receive their shots. For continued health and safety during the pandemic, minor children are not permitted in our medical facilities. Everyone who does enter must have an appointment – including those coming for COVID-19 vaccinations – unless the patient requires a caregiver’s assistance during their appointment.
CALLING ALL WW2/Korean War VETS!

Honor Flight San Diego is launching its “Operation Find Our Vets” campaign to locate WW2 and Korean War Vets to go on their honor flight to Washington D.C. Veterans from San Diego, Riverside and Imperial Counties are invited. The next trip is scheduled for Oct. 1 – 3, 2021 and is at no cost to Veterans and departs from the San Diego International Airport.

For more information, go to http://www.honorflightsandiego.org or call (800) 655-6997.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month

Each year millions of Americans face the reality of living with a mental illness. Since 1949, May has been observed as Mental Health Awareness Month with the purpose of reaching out to millions of people through the media, local events, and screenings. We invite you to join us in spreading the word that mental health is something everyone should care about.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the mental health of people of all ages. Now, more than ever, it is critical to reduce the stigma around mental health struggles, because that stigma often prevents individuals from seeking help. I know it’s likely true for most of us, that we also need reminders to take a minute, breathe, and take care of ourselves!

For more resources on mental health, visit:

Mental Health Month 2021 - Toolkit Download | Mental Health America (mhanational.org)

Home - NAMI San Diego

New Robotic Wheelchair

Now available at the Spinal Cord Injury Clinic – inquire with physical therapists about the iBOT from Mobius Mobility. It’s the wheelchair that can go down stairs with assistance, up hills, in water up to 3”, rocky terrain and the beach, over curbs.

See the Facebook video here: https://fb.watch/5kb0C6awr/

Custom Lenses for Special Corneas
Without his contacts, Army Veteran John Cancel would describe himself as almost legally blind. With specialized contacts, he still has problems with comfort and fit due to the specialized shape of his cornea. Using an innovative molding technology from EyePrint Pro that's available at VA San Diego Healthcare System (VASDHS), John has the right shape to help him see better with a greater fit and extended comfort.

This custom technology is new under the VA, with only one other facility having the right staff and certification for the program, according to Dr. Heather Jonasson, a VASDHS optometrist. In San Diego County, there is only one outside optometrist certified to offer these lenses. Since last June, Dr. Jonasson has seen seven or eight patients who are medically indicated to need molded contact lenses.

Molded contact lenses are scleral lenses that take the process further for a few patients. Scleral contact lenses are used to treat patients with irregular corneas that are hard to fit with regular contact lenses. They are large-diameter gas permeable lenses that offer patients with irregular corneas more comfort, stability, and sharper vision than other contact lens options available. For some patients, standard scleral contact lenses are not enough, and a custom mold of the eye must be made to reflect the unique shape of the patient's cornea.

"I was having this issue with some of my patients and I could not find an adequate contact lens option that would provide good comfort, vision, and maintain the eye health," said Dr. Jonasson. "The lenses would pop out of the patient's eye, the comfort was not there, and wearing time was too short for my patients."

These molded custom lenses provide a better fit over the cornea, allowing improved comfort, vision, and improved eye health. It really helped patients like John.

"I saw him seventeen times in one year trying to get a contact lens that would stay in his eye, or that would be comfortable for him," said Dr. Jonasson. "The outside doctor wasn't able to help him with the right eye. I made multiple revisions with different lenses to help him fix it, and this is the first time with these molded lenses where he's doing well as far as comfort, vision, and quality of life. He doesn't need to come back consistently to try and find a solution."

Of all the options available, "It's the only thing that works for me," said John.

As mentioned previously, molded lenses are available for medically indicated Veterans referred to the Optometry Clinic. For more information, please talk to your provider.
May is Better Hearing and Speech Month

Over the last year, the pandemic has changed the way we interact with each other as face coverings and social distancing has made communication problems more noticeable for many veterans. Audiology and Speech Pathology Services at VA San Diego can help veterans with communication problems, using face-to-face or virtual appointments.

1. Veterans who are having trouble with speech, voice or language can ask their Primary Care Provider for a referral to Speech Pathology Clinic. The Speech Pathology clinic is located at the La Jolla Medical Center.

2. Veterans who are having trouble with hearing can call Audiology (858-552-7564) or ask any medical support assistant to schedule an appointment, no referral needed. Audiology clinics are located at the La Jolla Medical Center, Oceanside, Mission Valley and Chula Vista.

Non-VA Emergency Care Notice

Veterans who receive Emergency care in a community hospital (non-VA) are required to notify the VA within 72 hours of the visit. Contact:

- Email: VHAEmergencyNotification@va.gov
- Phone: 1-844-72HRVHA or (844-724-7842)

VA San Diego COVID-19 Resource Guide

Times can be challenging for Veteran families right now and we’d like to help. Please check out this collection of resources to help families who are having difficulties.

Get Instant Updates Through GovDelivery

Get all the latest in VA San Diego feature stories, newsletters and information by registering with our GovDelivery service. To participate, go to our internet homepage and enter your email in the box “Connect with VA San Diego Healthcare System.”

Research Opportunities

Help us advance the science of health care by volunteering for a human subject research project at VA San Diego Healthcare System. More information can be found here.
Please Take Our Patient Satisfaction Surveys

We need feedback on your health care experience to continue improving the high-quality care and customer service we provide. We send our patient satisfaction surveys via mail and email on a regular basis and if you receive one, please take a moment to complete it. We are listening and want to improve – if you have a good or bad experience, we want to hear from you. We want you to Choose VA!

About VA San Diego Healthcare System

The VA San Diego Healthcare System (VASDHS) provides a wide range of inpatient and outpatient services at the medical center in La Jolla; and at six community clinics located in Chula Vista, Escondido, Imperial Valley, Mission Valley, Oceanside, Sorrento Valley and at the Rio Clinic. We provide medical, surgical, mental health, geriatric, spinal cord injury and advanced rehabilitation services. VASDHS has 296 authorized hospital beds including skilled nursing beds and operates several regional referral programs including cardiovascular surgery and spinal cord injury care.

We are affiliated with the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine and provide training for 1,256 medical interns, residents and fellows as well as 526 other health profession trainees in areas such as nursing, pharmacy, dental and dietetics. VASDHS has one of the largest research programs in the VA nationally with a budget of $44.3 million, >250 principal investigators and 677 projects.

**Number of Veterans who received care from VASDHS in FY 2020:** ..................................................... 84,572
*Number of Veterans in San Diego County:* ...................... 255,315
*Number of Veterans in Imperial Valley:* .................................. 5,694
**Total Veterans living in SD & Imperial Valley Counties:** ....261,009

*from VetPro, 3/2020

Important Phone Numbers:

- **VASDHS Main Line:** .......... (858) 552-8585
- **VASDHS Patient Call Center (Appointments/Questions):** ... (858) 552-7475
- **Health Benefits & Enrollment:** (858) 552-7523
- **Billing (Copays, etc.):** .................. (866) 802-6381
- **Community Care Authorization Line:** (858) 623-1879 option #3
- **Billing/POM (Community Care):** .... (858) 623-1879 option 2
- **Billing (TriWest):** .......................(855) 722-2838
- **Request your Records:** ........ (858) 642-3661
- **Suicide Prevention:** .... (800) 273-8255, press 1

**VA Secretary Wilkie’s Priorities:**

- Customer Service
- Implementing the MISSION Act
- Electronic Health Record
- Transforming our Business Systems