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VA reports rising patient capacity, stable supplies and staffing 8 weeks into COVID-19 emergency

WASHINGTON – Today, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it has maintained an increasing supply of beds for both Veterans and COVID-19 patients, steady supplies across the nation and a stable staffing situation in the vast majority of VA locations nearly two months into the national emergency.

As of late April, VA had the capacity to take in 12,215 critical and non-critical patients, up from 9,840 in March.

That increase was the result of a decision to defer elective surgeries in anticipation of a rising number of patients infected with COVID-19. It created capacity that has allowed VA to take in non-Veteran patients across the country.

This early preparation has allowed VA's overall occupancy rates to remain steady at 35-40% nationwide in both acute care and intensive care units (ICUs), well below the crisis capacity levels that some feared as the virus spread.

"VA's team has managed its resources wisely during this crisis," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "By deferring elective surgeries, the department opened ample space for COVID-19 patients and has been able to serve its 'Fourth Mission' of caring for all Americans during this crisis."

VA's stock of medical supplies remains robust with millions of N95 masks on hand, along with plenty supplies of hand sanitizer, gloves, gowns and eye protection. April 30 VA took possession of another 4.5 million masks the department purchased with the aid of New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu and inventor Dean Kamen who helped facilitate the medical supplies being flown to his home state in the face of this crisis.

VA also had 1,943 ICU ventilators on hand as of April 24, along with 826 transport ventilators and 1,218 anesthesia machines.

VA has been testing more and more people as America's overall testing capacity has increased. As of late April, VA tested more than 132,900 people, resulting in more than 92,000 negative tests and about 9,400 positive tests. The remainder are pending results.

About 63% of the Veterans who tested positive are now at least 14 days from that test result and most of them are recuperating at home.

While about 2,200 VA employees had tested positive for the coronavirus in late April, VA is still able to provide care to Veterans across the country, while helping 38 states and territories care for COVID-19 patients, either through missions assigned by the Federal Emergency Management Agency or by working directly with state officials.

Additionally, VA has been bringing on new personnel at a record pace to bolster staff at its facilities. Between March 29 and April 28, VA hired 9,338 medical staff, including 2,147 registered nurses and thousands of additional staff are expected to join VA into early May.

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