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VA's digital COVID-19 screening for Veterans, employees, aids in low infection rate

WASHINGTON —The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today the use of digital screening at VA health care facilities and increased telehealth has enabled the department to dramatically increase the rate of COVID-19 testing for Veterans and employees.

To date, VA has tested more than 576,000 Veterans and employees for COVID-19, one of many aggressive steps used to prevent transmission of the virus.

The Veterans Health Administration's COVID-19 employee infection rate is less than 1% of its workforce – much lower than other health care systems. Employees testing positive for coronavirus could be due to exposure in the community and not related to any potential workplace exposure.

"Testing is a critical piece of VA's public health response to protect and care for Veterans, their families, health care providers and staff during the COVID-19 pandemic," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "Our testing policies and procedures have helped to significantly limit the spread of the virus within our medical facilities, while universal COVID-19 testing for patients and staff as well as other safeguards at VA's community living centers and spinal cord injury units, has minimized the COVID-19 exposure risk for some of our most vulnerable patient populations."

In March, VA tested an average of 631 people a day for COVID-19. As of Aug. 24, VA is currently testing an average of 6,300 people daily, approximately a 900% increase, and has diagnosed 43,276 Veterans with COVID-19. Among its 9.2 million patients enrolled in VA health care, 3,195 are active COVID-19 cases, 413 of which are inpatient. A total of 37,293 VA COVID-19 patients have reached convalescence, meaning they have been discharged from care or are 14 days past their last positive test, whichever comes later.

Veterans can request a COVID-19 test by sending a secure message to their provider via My HealtheVet, scheduling an appointment online or calling their provider by phone.

Veterans must be enrolled in VA health care to receive a COVID-19 test through VA. There is no copay. Results typically take two to four days and the medical provider will contact the Veteran with results. Veterans who test positive should monitor their symptoms, stay in touch with their medical provider and avoid contact with anyone else.

Visit VA's public health response webpage for more information on ways to protect against COVID-19. For a real-time look at the status of COVID-19 patients who have been tested or treated at VA facilities visit VA's COVID-19 National Summary webpage.

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