

**St. Cloud VA**

# UPDATE

**November 20, 2020**



*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](mailto:barry.venable@va.gov)*

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## **Stay Safe!**

**Wear a mask**  
**Practice social distancing**  
**Avoid large gatherings**  
**Wash your hands**

## **Vaccine Planning**

As most of you are probably aware, there are a number of companies working to produce a COVID-19 vaccine, several of which are in the late stages of testing. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) may authorize the use of one or more of these COVID-19 vaccines soon. During a pandemic the FDA can provide emergency approval (Emergency Use Approval, or EUA) of a drug still being studied if current clinical trial results show benefits and safety while the studies are ongoing. Once a vaccine is authorized, we anticipate that VA will begin offering the vaccine to the highest risk /

high priority health care personnel and Veterans.

VA is working with the CDC to develop a phased plan to maximize the benefit of COVID-19 vaccines authorized or approved by the FDA. Initially, supplies will be limited and as more vaccine becomes available, VA's goal is to offer the vaccine to all health care personnel and Veterans who choose to be vaccinated.

We are in the initial stages of planning this effort locally—again, not because we have an approved vaccine to provide, but rather to make sure we are ready when one does become available.

In VA, immunizations for high-risk Veterans and staff will be based on CDC guidelines, and includes the following criteria:

- Risk of acquiring infection
- Risk of severe illness and death
- Risk of transmitting disease
- Risk to essential workers, including health care personnel.

Based on these criteria, VA will likely first offer the vaccine to health care personnel at high-risk from COVID-19 as they are essential to providing continued care for patients throughout the pandemic. In addition to protecting our employees, vaccinating these individuals has several benefits, including:

- Decreasing transmission to patients, who may be at high risk for severe disease if infected
- Decreasing transmission to other health care workers
- Promoting a stronger, healthier workforce to care for our Veterans

Our organization, along with VA medical centers across the country, has completed initial tabletop exercises to prepare for the initial receipt of the vaccine. These exercises help us determine how we will coordinate communications and schedule immunizations for priority groups. The exercises also address ordering, storage, handling, and administration of the vaccine, to include determining how we will distribute immunizations based on the number of doses available.

Safety never takes a day off, and I am confident the vaccination effort will be conducted as safely as possible. Ultimately, VA's goal is to offer COVID-19 vaccine to all Veterans and employees who want to be vaccinated. COVID-19 vaccines will be a personal decision that each of us must make based on an individual assessment of risks and benefits. The risks of not getting vaccinated include the very same risks that we currently face:

- Illness, hospitalization, and other health risks

- Susceptibility to COVID-19 infection at work, at home, and in your community
- Risk of infecting your loved ones, coworkers, Veterans and others if you are exposed to COVID-19
- Increased stress on healthy coworkers if you get sick

In contrast to the risks, the benefits of getting a COVID-19 vaccine when it is offered include:

- Less likely to get sick from COVID-19
- Less likely to spread COVID-19 to others, contributing to the community efforts to reduce the spread of the virus
- More likely to have a strong immune response and milder illness if you do get COVID-19

Even with a vaccine, the pandemic will not just disappear. Face coverings, personal protective equipment, physical distancing, and other precautions against COVID-19 will still be critically important and required—both for those who are vaccinated and those who are not—until new infections drop to low levels.

As more information on vaccine becomes available, we'll share it. In the meantime, don't let your guard (or your mask) down!

Sincerely,

Brent

**BRENT A. THELEN, PhD**  
Health Care System Director

## The Occupational Therapy Clinic is now located in Bldg. 116

The St. Cloud VA Health Care System is pleased to announce the opening of the newly renovated space in the improved Occupational Therapy Clinic, located in Bldg. 116 at the St. Cloud VA Medical Center in St. Cloud. Clinics that are in the new space include the Speech Therapy Lab, Low Vision Services and space for our Traumatic Brain Injury clinic. These new spaces are more conducive to navigation by wheelchair, include a bright and spacious Occupational Therapy treatment area with a kitchen, bedroom, and bathroom space designed to help Veterans in rehabilitation prepare for the home setting. This area is currently serving outpatient Veterans and will also serve our Community Living Center Veterans once COVID-19 restrictions are decreased.

## PRESCRIPTION WINDOW PICK-UP CHANGES

- EFFECTIVE Immediately-

Due to COVID19 concerns, only urgent prescriptions may be picked up at the Outpatient Pharmacy.

If you feel your situation is urgent please Call First, toll-free at (855) 560-1724 and press option 8.

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### PRESCRIPTION WINDOW PICK-UP CHANGES

- EFFECTIVE Immediately-  
Due to COVID-19 safety concerns, please



**Call First!**



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Pharmacy is using an all mail-order system.

Please allow 10-14 days for delivery.

\*Only **URGENT** prescriptions may be picked up at the Outpatient Pharmacy.

\*If you feel your situation is urgent please **Call First**, toll-free at (855) 560-1724 and press option 8.

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#### How to request a refill:



**By phone:** Make a toll-free call to (855)-560-1724 to place refills.



**Online:** Request prescription refills online at [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov) through My HealtheVet. You can view your prescription history and track the delivery status of your package online.



**By mail:** Complete the request form and mail it to your VA pharmacy.

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## Phone Service Reminder

It has been reported by multiple Veterans that the VA phone number is showing up as "Potential Spam" when being called by staff. Most smartphones will display as such unless the number is listed as a contact on the phone by the user. In these cases, please inform Veterans to list the St. Cloud VA and 320-252-1670 as a contact.

## Coffee Talks

Coffee Talks are informal conversations intended to provide Veterans an opportunity to have their questions about VA health care answered.

VA health care enrollment provides valuable benefits to Veterans and their families. Non-enrolled Veterans, Veterans new to the VA health care system, and enrolled Veterans who want to learn how to most effectively use VA systems of care are encouraged to 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*

**Dec. 11, 2020**  
**2—4 p.m.**  
**St. Cloud VAMC**  
**Bldg. 29, Rm. 20E**  
**Or dial 800-767-1750,**  
**participant code 11242#**

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 enrolled?

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



## National Veterans Creative Arts Competition and Festival News

The local St. Cloud VA Art Show, part of the National Veterans Creative Arts Competition and Festival, will not be occurring in February 2021 due to ongoing concerns surrounding COVID-19.

We are in the process of evaluating potential dates for the show in the fall of 2021 and will provide further details as soon as they are known. Please direct any questions to Madge Scherer, music therapist and local program coordinator at 320-252-1670 ext. 7336.

## Inspiring Hope Through Garden Yoga

When the pandemic hit, Veterans at the Fargo VA—like many Veterans across the country—could no longer meet in person at VA for weekly yoga classes. For those who participated in yoga together several days a week, it was difficult not knowing when they would see each other again.

Nancy Ruud, MS, RN, Whole Health Coach and yoga instructor at the Fargo VA, understands the power of these connections and the health effects from yoga. After sharing online yoga resources during the first few months of quarantine, she felt the need to find a way to bring Veterans together safely to enhance their well-being.

That's when she thought of the Healing Garden on the front lawn of the Fargo VA. While often used for its walking paths, Ruud saw the garden in a different light: a perfect outdoor yoga space. After creating parameters for weather considerations, coordinating with the other yoga instructors, setting up health screenings and placing mats six feet apart, Ruud was able to host their first class in person since the start of the pandemic, with the help of her Whole Health teammates.

The joy of seeing fellow classmates after long absences due to self-quarantine brought several Veterans to tears.

“It was a beautiful thing to witness,” said Danielle Olauson, Whole Health Coordinator at the Fargo VA. “They were so excited to see each other and were hopeful to have some normality coming back to their life.”

“One Veteran mentioned that they wanted to come not even knowing who’d they’d get to see—not just their instructor, or who could make it that day, but did they lose any of their comrades to COVID-19?” said Ruud.

Knowing Veterans may not have been active during quarantine, Ruud started with a gentle yoga class to help those starting over to regain their mobility. And with many Veteran participants in the high-risk age range, Ruud and the Whole Health team were careful about safety.

“One Veteran mentioned to me that they felt very safe, and thought it was perfect that we have this space and could actually accomplish two goals—both safety and being together in a group,” Ruud said.

“Many Veterans hadn’t even seen their doctors yet and were very grateful to be active again and come back to the VA.”

That deep connection with others in a class is just one of the many benefits of yoga.

“As a Whole Health Coach, so many Veterans bring up yoga when they’re thinking about self-care,” Ruud said. “It’s very surprising how many Veterans will say, ‘well, the only other thing I’ve been thinking about is... maybe I should be learning yoga,’” she said.

When Veterans practice yoga, the physical postures and meditative breathing help to unite the mind and body, engaging the nervous system and creating that deep connection that allows for healing and relaxation.

“In yoga, we use our breath to help move our bodies,” said Ruud.

When the mind and body are better connected, it becomes easier to manage other areas of Veteran’s lives and helps to boost compassion, gratitude, and “Chi” states—all of which contribute to greater happiness.

“Yoga, in some form, is helpful to everyone. As a nurse, I teach Veterans how this connects to their sleep, how they eat, how they mentally and physically feel and ultimately, how they move through other aspects of their lives,” said Ruud. “Yoga allows them to develop skills and a sense of accomplishment or empowerment that they’re learning something they can come back to, deepening their practice with each class.”

Yoga is a great way for Veterans to start their Whole Health journey. The sunshine, fresh air, and vibrant surroundings make the Healing Garden at the Fargo VA the perfect place for Veterans to escape mentally and physically, while also engaging their bodies in ways that will increase their stamina, strength, flexibility, and balance.

“Instructors consider the health challenges and personal goals of each Veteran and tailor classes to meet their needs,” said Ruud. “Being able to move their bodies in this way improves their confidence to do more of the things they want and improves their sense of well-being. Not to mention, yoga is a great way for Veterans to connect and bond with one another, combatting social isolation.”

When making calls to Veterans to let them know they were restarting classes, Ruud remembered one Veteran who had mentioned they were interested in trying yoga but had yet to attend a class. He

decided to come to their first Garden Yoga session.

“He came up to me after class and said, ‘I really don’t know why I didn’t try this sooner. I can’t believe how much I enjoyed it, I feel so calm,’” she said. “He’s come to every class since the first one.”

A few weeks after the success of the first class, classes were expanded to incorporate their contract yoga instructors which expanded the offerings to three classes per week.

“2020 has been an unprecedented year, one we’ll never forget,” she said. “I am grateful to be helping during the pandemic to bring Veterans back to feel that sense of normalcy again.”

For those looking to practice yoga virtually, below are some helpful resources to get started:

- **Veterans Yoga Project:** A collection of mind-body practices to help you develop practices related to breath, meditation, mindful movement, guided rest, and gratitude.
- **Breathing, Stretching, Relaxation:** A 10-minute exercise using simple physical postures and breathing exercises to connect your body and mind.
- **Kula for Karma:** Yoga for Veterans: This six-part guided yoga and meditation series consists of 30-minute videos that take you through asana, adaptive yoga, restorative practice, easy flow, power yoga, and meditation.
- **Comeback Yoga:** Free yoga classes to help military personnel, their families and supporters develop resiliency in response to their experience.

For more information on the benefits of yoga and other self-care resources, visit <https://www.va.gov/wholehealth/>.

## **Stay Safe from Scammers: Tips from the Better Business Bureau**

Are you purchasing more online now? It’s convenient. It’s fast. But is it safe?

The Better Business Bureau (BBB) found that online purchase scams have been in the top three types of scams since 2017. With this year’s social distancing to limit exposure, and many businesses previously closed and now slowly reopening with limited hours, many consumers are turning to online purchases for home delivery. But predators have been taking advantage of this increase in online purchases.

BBB reports that in 2020 so far, 64% of reported scams are from online purchases, with a staggering 80.5% of consumers reporting they lost money from these scams.

### **What is an Online Purchase Scam?**

Online purchase scams typically involve the purchase of products and/or services via a website. Scammers offer attractive deals, but no product/service is delivered once payment is made. Or scammers pretend to purchase an item, but then send a fake check and ask for a refund of the “accidental” overpayment.

**Outsmart Scammers with Prevention Tips**  
BBB offers [helpful information and tips](#) to stay safe from [online purchase scams](#) and many other types of scams, such as scams for rental, employment, credit card and debt relief, tax collection, health care, and identity theft.

### **Ten Tips to Protect Against Most Scams**

1. Never send money via gift card or wire transfer to someone you have never met face-to-face.
2. Avoid clicking on links or opening attachments in unsolicited emails.
3. Don't believe everything you see.
4. Double check your online purchase is secure before checking out.
5. Use extreme caution when dealing with anyone you've met online.
6. Never share personally identifiable information with someone who has contacted you unsolicited, whether it's over the phone, by email, on social media, even at your front door.
7. Resist the pressure to act immediately.
8. Use secure and traceable transactions.
9. Whenever possible, work with local businesses.
10. Be cautious about what you share on social media.

### **Find More Tips at the Better Business Bureau**

BBB offers a handy [scam tracker](#) to find local scams in your area, a way to [file a complaint](#), and a [weekly scam alert email](#) to stay updated on scammers' latest tricks and tips to stay ahead of them.

Safeguard your health. Safeguard your family. And safeguard against scammers.

## **VA Debt Management Center to resume sending notification letters in January 2021**

**Contact us to make arrangements for outstanding VA benefits debts**

**FOR HELP** contact Debt Management Center, Call or submit your request online  
**1-800-827-0648**  
<https://iris.custhelp.va.gov>

If you have questions about your VA benefits or the status of your claim

VA Regional Office <i>for other VA benefits</i>	<b>1-800-827-1000</b>
Health Resource Center <i>for health care debts</i>	<b>1-888-827-4817</b>
VA Education Call Center <i>for education benefits</i>	<b>1-888-442-4551</b>

The VA Debt Management Center (DMC) is sending a letter this month to Veterans with benefit debts advising that due process notification letters will resume after January 1, 2021.

The November letter reads as follows:

Dear Veteran/Beneficiary,

We hope this letter finds you well. You are receiving this letter because you may have outstanding VA benefit debt(s), and we want you to be aware of actions VA will take after January 1, 2021, and your options.

To ease financial difficulties during the pandemic, the VA Debt Management Center (DMC) suspended issuing debt notification letters and suspended collection action on debts established after April 3, 2020, through January 1, 2021. DMC also offered suspensions or extended repayment plans for debts established prior to April 3, 2020.

### **WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN 2021**

If your debt was established after April 3, 2020, DMC will issue your debt notification letter(s) starting in January 2021. If you

have debt that was established prior to April 3, where collections have been suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, your suspension will end on January 1, 2021, and the DMC will resume withholding from your VA benefits to pay the debt effective with your February 1, 2021, benefit payment. If you do not receive VA benefits, your payment will be due to DMC by February 1, 2021.

### **WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW**

If you expect difficulties making payments, you are not required to wait until after January 1, 2021, to request assistance. Please review the information found on our website: <https://www.va.gov/debtman>; or reach out to the DMC for help at <https://iris.custhelp.va.gov/app/ask/> or call us at 1-800-827-0648.

We can work with you to determine your debt relief options, which may include:

- Establishing a repayment plan.
- Requesting a waiver.
- Disputing the debt.
- Submitting a compromise offer.
- Requesting a temporary hardship suspension.

### **WHOM TO CONTACT**

- For questions about your VA benefit debt, including information on how to make voluntary repayment arrangements or request a waiver, a dispute, or a compromise offer, submit your online request at <https://iris.custhelp.va.gov/app/ask/> or call 1-800-827-0648 from 6:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. CT Monday through Friday.

- If you have a question about your VA Benefits or the status of a claim, please call:
  - Education benefits – VA Education Contact Center at 1-888-442-4551.
  - Other VA benefits – VA Regional Office at 1-800-827-1000.
- For questions about your VA Health Care debt, call the Health Resource Center at 1-866-400-1238.
- If your debt was referred to the U.S. Department of the Treasury, the debt will remain under their jurisdiction. Treasury can be reached at:
  - Cross-Servicing Program at 1-888-826-3127.
  - Treasury Offset Program at 1-800-304-3107.

We are here to support you during this COVID-19 pandemic. Please follow national and local guidelines to stay healthy and safe.

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

### **Outpatient Clinics Closed for Federal Holiday**

Thursday, November 26

Clinics in Brainerd, Montevideo and Alexandria will be closed. Urgent Care at the St. Cloud VA will be open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

### **Suicide Prevention for Caregivers**

Monday, November 30 2:30 -4 p.m.

VA knows that a caregiver to a Veteran is a keen observer of the Veteran's physical and mental health, and often a trusted confidant. That's why we want caregivers to

have key information about suicide prevention, the warning signs for suicide risk, and where to get help when it is needed. Caregivers play an important role in a Veteran's life — sometimes a lifesaving one. Whether you're the spouse, another family member, or a friend of a Veteran, you may be the first to recognize changes in mood and behavior, such as expressions of anger or emotional pain or increasing use of alcohol or drugs. No matter your relationship with the Veteran, as a caregiver you have a vital role in supporting the Veteran and preventing a crisis. For more information visit: <https://tinyurl.com/SuicidePreventionCaregivers> or contact Alicia at 320-252-2670 Ext. 7283.

**Appointments by phone only: Veteran's Law Clinic**

Tuesday, December 1            Noon -2 p.m.  
Free legal consultation for Veterans by appointment only. This clinic is not for criminal issues. For more information or to schedule an appointment please contact Central Minnesota Legal Services at 320-257-4855 or 800-622-7773.

**Veterans Affairs Radio Show**

Monday, December 7        8:10-8:30 a.m.  
KNSI AM 1450/FM 103.3

**Coffee Talks**

Friday, December 11            2 -4 p.m.  
St. Cloud VA, Bldg. 29, Rm. 20E or dial 800-767-1750, participant code 11242#

Coffee Talks are informal conversations intended to provide Veterans an opportunity to have their questions about VA health care answered. 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.

**Appointments by phone only: Veteran's Law Clinic**

Tuesday, December 15            Noon -2 p.m.  
Free legal consultation for Veterans by appointment only. This clinic is not for criminal issues. For more information or to schedule an appointment please contact Central Minnesota Legal Services at 320-257-4855 or 800-622-7773.

**Voices for Veterans Radio Show**

Wednesday, December 16    8:10-8:30 a.m.  
WJON AM 1240

**Outpatient Clinics Closed for Federal Holiday**

Friday, December 25  
Clinics in Brainerd, Montevideo and Alexandria will be closed. Urgent Care at the St. Cloud VA will be open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

*For a complete Calendar of Events, go to <https://www.stcloud.va.gov/calendar.asp>*

# Quick Reference Phone List

<b>Main St. Cloud VA HCS Phone Number</b>	<b>320-252-1670 or 800-247-1739</b>
TDD User	320-255-6450
<b>Max J. Beilke VA Clinic, Alexandria</b>	320-759-2640
<b>Brainerd VA Clinic</b>	218-855-1115
<b>Montevideo VA Clinic</b>	320-269-2222
<b>Veterans Crisis Line</b>	<b>800-273-8255 Press 1</b>
<b>Homeless Veteran Hotline</b>	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: [www.stcloud.va.gov](http://www.stcloud.va.gov)

Like us on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/StCloudVAHCS](https://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: <http://www.stcloud.va.gov> and on the right-hand side of the page is a request to sign up for email updates. Enter your email address and you are automatically signed up to receive email updates from our web page.