

St. Cloud VA

UPDATE

December 18, 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

COVID-19 vaccine

Late last week, VA announced initial plans for COVID-19 vaccine distribution and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued an emergency use authorization for a vaccine developed by Pfizer/BioNTech. Per the VA plan, in our region of the country the Minneapolis and Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care Systems were among the first of 37 VA sites planned to receive the early shipments of vaccine.

These medical centers were chosen for their ability to vaccinate large numbers of people and store the Pfizer vaccine at extremely cold temperatures.

Those medical centers have started offering the vaccine to the highest risk / high priority health care personnel and Veterans residing in long-term care units.

An additional vaccine, this one developed by Moderna, is widely anticipated to gain FDA approval on Dec. 18. The St. Cloud VA's turn to receive vaccine will come soon enough, and we too will begin to offer a vaccine to high-risk health care staff and to Veterans in our long-term care units.

COVID-19 vaccine implementation will include an initial limited-supply phase followed by a general implementation phase, when large supplies of the vaccine will be available to Veterans who want to receive one. Our goal is to offer it to all Veterans and employees who want to be vaccinated.

We are actively planning this effort and will share more details as they are available

There is no need to call or to reserve a vaccination—we will reach out to you in the coming months. Vaccinating the 38,000 Veterans served by the St. Cloud VA is a process that will go on for several months.

The most current information on VA's COVID-19 vaccination effort is always available at <https://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/>. On this website is a tool called "Keep Me Informed." Veterans will be able to use the tool to indicate whether they intend to get the vaccine. That data will then be passed along to VA medical facilities. It can be found at <https://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/stay-informed>. By sharing your

interest, you can help us better prepare as we work to offer vaccines to more Veterans

Even with a vaccine, the pandemic will not just disappear. Face coverings, personal protective equipment, screening, testing, 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—for some time in the future when until new infections drop to low levels.

Travel Pay Claim Process is Online

The St. Cloud VA Health Care System is using the new Beneficiary Travel Self-Service (BTSSS) to reimburse eligible Veterans and beneficiaries for travel to and from VA medical appointments.

Click on [step-by-step instructions](#) for more information on how to use BTSSS.

This system allows users to submit and track transportation reimbursement claims using a secure web-based portal on the [Access VA](#), available 24/7, 365 days a year.

BTSSS has many advantages, for example, it:

- Reduces the need for completing hard copy claim submissions in-person at the facility by replacing and eliminating the previous kiosk method.
- Provides an easy to use web-based application that allows you to enter your claim over the internet via [AccessVA](#).

- Ensures timely processing and payment of travel reimbursements and reduces manual intervention and improper claim payments through automated features.
- Authenticates the Veteran or Beneficiary by:

- 1.) VA PIV card;
- 2.) A DS Logon Level 2 account.

Veterans will need to visit [AccessVA](#), to select submit a travel claim, and logon using a DS Logon account. A DS Logon is an ID issued by DoD that will allows Veterans and caregivers to access many DoD and VA sites with one user username and password. If you need a DS Logon ID log into [Need a DS Log on?](#) to get started.

Here are some questions and answers about the BTSSS travel claim process:

Q1: Who is eligible for Beneficiary Travel Reimbursement?

Veterans and caregivers may be eligible for travel pay. A list of eligibility requirements can be found on the [VA Travel Pay Reimbursement](#) webpage.

Q2: How do I submit a travel reimbursement claim?

The St. Cloud VA Health Care System has implemented the new web-based portal to submit and process beneficiary travel claims. The new portal, the Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System (BTSSS), is VA's preferred method to receive travel reimbursement claims. BTSSS will phase out claims submitted through the facility kiosks. However, in-person claims, and hard-copy

submissions will still be available but will take longer to process. BTSSS is available through the [AccessVA](#) website.

Q3: Are there advantages to using the Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System (BTSSS)?

The BTSSS automates the claims process to ensure timely processing and payment of travel reimbursement claims. With BTSSS, turnaround time to evaluate and settle a claim is less than 5 days. BTSSS allows Veterans and caregivers to submit claims 24/7, 365 days a year from a computer or mobile device. It also allows users to electronically track the status of a claim request.

Q4: Can I get help to file my first claim?

There are several sources of help for filing a claim. BTSSS was built with several self-help tools to guide users through the process of logging on and submitting/tracking claims. Additionally, a user's guide for BTSSS is available on the [VA Travel Pay Reimbursement](#) webpage. Lastly, Veterans with a DS Logon who do not have access to a computer can get help from a travel clerk at the facility.

Q5: How do I access BTSSS?

BTSSS is available through the [AccessVA](#) webpage. To submit a claim, Visit [AccessVA](#), select submit a travel claim, and logon using a DS Log on Level 2 account. A DS Logon is an ID issued by DoD that will allow Veterans and caregivers to access many VA and DoD sites with one user username and password. [Need a DS Log on?](#) If you need assistance obtaining a DS Log On, you may contact 1.800.538.9552

Monday-Friday, 7:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.
Central Time.

Q6: Why did VA change to BTSSS?

The current claims submission processes are 100% manual. BTSSS will significantly reduce human intervention for each reimbursement claim request and improve tracking, reporting, and the auditing capability for all stages of the claims process.

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*

Jan. 15, 2021
2—4 p.m.
St. Cloud VAMC
Bldg. 29, Rm. 20E

Now offering a *video option* to join from the comfort of your home using your computer, mobile device, or tablet.

To attend in-person or virtually 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!



VA can help with those holiday blues

Here are some ways to cope and manage Holiday traditions and family get-togethers are a source of comfort for many. But the holidays can also act as anniversaries of unpleasant changes that have happened in

the last year. Veterans may also have memories of being deployed over a holiday during their service and could experience challenges with returning to civilian norms.

For Veterans diagnosed with PTSD, the holidays can be even more difficult to manage. While there are often bright spots, the unique struggles that trauma survivors can face as the year ends can often overshadow the joy of the season.

Helping you manage over the holiday season



If you know someone with PTSD, there are things you can do to make sure the holiday season is pleasant and enjoyable for everyone.

There are ways to cope and manage these feelings and stressful events. Here are some tips from our clinicians that can help you manage your symptoms over this holiday season:

- Don't overschedule. Leave time for yourself.
- Make a plan to get things done. Set small, doable goals.
- When stressed, remind yourself what has helped in the past.
- Use the tools from [PTSD Coach app](#) or [PTSD Coach Online](#) to help you manage stress.

- Reach out for support if you need it. Know who you can rely on for help. If your symptoms are getting worse or you feel down, reach out to your provider or
- Call the [Crisis Line](#).

If you know someone with PTSD, there are things you can do to make sure the holiday season is pleasant and enjoyable for everyone.

- Educate yourself: Download and read [Understand PTSD and PTSD Treatment](#) (PDF) to learn more about how PTSD affects your loved one.
- Talk to your family member about what they need to feel comfortable during the holidays. If your loved one needs services, call [Coaching into Care](#) for advice on talking to them about treatment.
- Keep important resources at hand, such as the [Veterans Crisis Line](#), a confidential toll-free hotline, online chat, or text. Veterans and their loved ones can call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, [chat online](#), or send a text message to 838255 to receive confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

The holiday season can be difficult for people with PTSD, but there are healthy ways to cope and manage stress and have positive mental health throughout the holidays.

Here's more information about [PTSD](#).

Manage Stress

Pay attention to your level of stress, which may increase during busy times or times of change. The current pandemic has increased stress levels for everyone and makes it even more important to take steps to manage your stress. See ideas for stress management during stressful times here:

Healthy Living During Stressful Times

Stress comes in many forms and can have a negative effect on health if it continues too long or feels overwhelming. Many tools are available to help you manage and reduce your stress.

Manage Stress: A Healthy Living Message

- The Manage Stress Healthy Living message website includes information such as:
- Specific suggestions for managing stress
- Linkage to a [Manage Stress Workbook](#) with a focus on mindfulness
- A [Pleasant Activities Tip Sheet](#)
- Links to relaxation recordings. These include simple breathing exercises and mindfulness meditation. The recordings range from 2 minutes to 22 minutes.

Veterans' Health Library

<https://www.veteranshealthlibrary.va.gov/>

The Veterans Health Library (VHL) offers Veterans, families and caregivers 24/7 Internet access to a variety of health information. It is available to anyone, anywhere, no matter where they receive care. The VHL information, resources, and

tools are written for Veterans. Items within the VHL on Manage Stress include:

- [Stress: Causes and Effects](#)
- [Keys to Managing Stress](#)
- [Mindfulness and Relaxation Resources for Veterans](#)

Basic Stress Management Suggestions:

- **Physical Activity**—Take a brisk walk or do something else that is active. Regular physical activity is best for reducing stress.
- **Problem Solving**—Learn problem solving skills! They can improve your ability to cope. There is a web-based problem-solving program available and your VA may offer a class. See Veteran training in the helpful websites below.
- **Relaxation Training**—Learn relaxation and mindfulness skills. These skills can help you to notice and manage the responses in your body that come with stress. Daily relaxation may protect you from some of the consequences of stress.
- **Expression**—Speak up in respectful ways. Sharing thoughts and feelings in an assertive, respectful manner can help buffer stress. Keeping negative thoughts inside can increase feelings of stress.
- **Time Management**—List what needs to get done, make plans for addressing issues, and stick to the plan. There are many resources on time management in libraries and on-line.
- **Positive Thinking**—Stress is often associated with negative thinking. Focus your attention on positive thoughts. It may help to practice gratitude by:

- Listing at least 3 things each day that you feel grateful for
- Asking others what they are grateful for
- Expressing gratitude by thanking others
- Asking yourself, when facing a challenge, “What can I be grateful for in this situation?”

- **Pleasant Activities**—You may be feeling the effects of stress if you are not making time for fun in your life. Plan to have regular, enjoyable activities and see if this reduces your stress.
- **Social Support**—Building social connections can help stress seem more manageable. Consider ways to connect with others, such as:
 - Volunteering
 - Walking with a partner
 - Planning a virtual get together with family or friends
 - Take an on-line class or join a club
 - Contact a friend by phone or text or email

Know a buddy who stopped using VA?

Encourage them contact our enrollment office at 320-255-6340 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) to update their enrollment. We would love to hear from them.

UPCOMING EVENTS

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.

Outpatient Clinics Closed for Federal Holiday

Friday, January 1

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.

Veterans Affairs Radio Show

Monday, January 4 8:10-8:30 a.m.

KNSI AM 1450/FM 103.3

Coffee Talks

Friday, January 15 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.

Voices for Veterans Radio Show

Wednesday, January 20 8:10-8:30 a.m.

WJON AM 1240

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

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: www.stcloud.va.gov

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: <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.