



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
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Thomas J. Saadi
Commissioner

DVA COVID-19 Update: December 18, 2020

The Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) Healthcare Center (HCC) had one new case of a COVID-19 positive Veteran Patient this week, which after a recent surge in COVID-19 cases, there are eight COVID positive Veteran Patients now in the Isolation and Recovery Unit, seven Veteran Patients transferred to a state COVID-19 Receiving Nursing Facility (CRF) due to the HCC COVID positive Isolation Unit section reaching capacity. There are four Veteran Patients in the non-COVID section of the HCC Isolation Unit for protective monitoring. Veterans in non-COVID Isolation/Quarantine are either new admissions, patients who recently returned from acute care or contact tracers who have tested negative for the virus, and remain in the Isolation Unit until cleared by clinical staff for release to their regular rooms. The HCC continues weekly COVID-19 testing of all Veteran Patients.

The DVA Residential Facility had five Veteran Residents test COVID-19 positive this week, all of whom are in the Isolation Recovery Unit. There are four Veteran Residents in the non-COVID section of the Isolation Unit for protective monitoring. Veterans in non-COVID Isolation/Quarantine are either new admissions, patients who recently returned from acute care or contact tracers who have tested negative for the virus, and remain in the Isolation Unit until cleared by clinical staff for release to their regular rooms. The DVA continues regular testing of all Residential Veterans which began in July and with a "Point Prevalence Test" of all Veteran Residents conducted on Tuesday with five out of one-hundred and ten Veterans testing positive for the virus. In December we increased testing of Veteran Residents from once to twice per month with additional testing of Veteran Vocational Therapeutic Program participants. To date the DVA has tested two hundred and thirty-nine Veteran Residents and Patients (most multiple times) for COVID-19 with fifty-seven testing positive or retesting positive since March 2020, half of which were in the past month. Of those testing positive, thirty-three recovered from the virus, twelve are currently in the Residential and HCC COVID-19 Isolation Units, seven Veterans are at designated COVID-19 Receiving Nursing Facilities and one is in acute care. One Veteran Resident and two Veteran Patients passed away in the spring and one Veteran Patient passed last week from COVID-19 complications.

The DVA continues weekly COVID testing of direct care and front-line staff, which will continue until further notice. We continue to experience delays in receiving test results, an issue I have raised with other State officials who are attempting to address the problem. A total of forty-two staff members test positive for COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic, nineteen of whom tested positive in the past two weeks. Twenty-two DVA staff members have recovered and returned to work and twenty are in home isolation until cleared to return to work consistent with CDC and DPH guidelines. DVA preparations for the anticipated surge in Veteran and staff COVID-19 included planning with Office of the Governor, Federal VA and DPH. In accordance with those plans on Saturday Commissioner Saadi submitted an urgent request for support to the State Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to address the temporary loss of a number of HCC staff and vacancies to which the Federal VA responded providing personnel to the DVA this past Monday. This temporary support allows the DVA to currently maintain regular and COVID-19 response operations pending the return of isolating staff. We continue efforts to secure temporary contract staff and fill full and part-time staff vacancies.

Commissioner Saadi has directed the expansion of the HCC Isolation Unit COVID positive capacity in the next week to minimize the transfer of Veterans to CRFs and return those at a CRF to the DVA. Commissioner Saadi and HCC leadership are engaged in near daily planning meetings with State officials and our designated vaccine provider to prepare for administering vaccinations to staff and to Veteran Patients as soon as feasible followed by vaccination of Veteran Residents.

The DVA COVID-19 Protocols with most recent changes, DVA COVID-19 weekly updates and other important information is available at: <https://portal.ct.gov/DVA/Pages/DVA-COVID-19-Updates>.