



## **Commissioner's Message Regarding Incident at West Haven VA and COVID-19 Agency Update – November 13, 2020**

“The staff of the CT Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) are deeply saddened by the tragic accident at the Federal VA in West Haven which took the lives of two persons and injured others. We extend our condolences and prayers to the families of the victims, to Director Al Montoya and to our Federal colleagues with whom we have a strong partnership and who, despite this tragedy, continue in the mission of serving our state’s Veterans.” Said DVA Commissioner Thomas J. Saadi

With regards to the COVID-19 pandemic, the DVA Healthcare Center (HCC) has five Veteran Patients in our Isolation and Recovery Unit, all of whom have tested negative for the virus, however as they are new admissions or patients who recently returned from acute care, they will remain in the Isolation Unit until cleared by clinical staff for release and transferred from the Isolation Unit to their rooms after completing protective monitoring regime which includes multiple negative COVID-19 tests. Among these five Veterans is an individual who initially tested COVID-19 positive last week and has since tested negative for the virus and negative for antibodies (latent and acute) on multiple occasions indicating that the initial positive test was a “false positive.” As such, the DVA HCC has not had a COVID positive patient since May 5, 2020.

The DVA Residential Facility has no COVID-19 positive Veteran Residents in its Isolation Recovery Unit and no new Veteran Residents have tested positive for COVID-19 since June. There are three Veteran Residents in the Residential Isolation Unit who have tested negative for the virus, however they recently returned from an acute care facility or other extended off campus stay, therefore they will remain in the Isolation Unit until cleared by clinical staff for release. The DVA Residential Facility completed four rounds of COVID-19 testing of all Residential Veterans in July, September and October with all Veteran Residents testing negative for COVID-19. Testing of all Veteran Residents is next scheduled for November 17<sup>th</sup> and is to continue monthly until further notice. The HCC is conducting weekly testing of all Veteran Patients who have all tested negative for the virus each week since testing began. This “Point Prevalence Testing” of all Veterans is a key element in our rigorous efforts to mitigate the potential spread of COVID-19.

To date the DVA has tested two hundred and thirty-seven Veteran Residents and Patients (most tested multiple times) for COVID-19 with twenty-five testing positive early in the pandemic. Of the twenty-five Veterans who tested positive, twenty-two recovered from the virus. One Veteran Resident and two Veteran Patients passed away in late April and early May due to COVID-19 complications.

In addition to ongoing testing of all Veterans, the DVA has conducted COVID-19 testing of all direct care and front-line staff weekly since early July and will continue weekly testing until at least the end of the year. A total of sixteen staff members tested positive for COVID-19 over the past eight months, with eleven having recovered and returned to work consistent with CDC and DPH guidelines. Five DVA staff members identified as COVID positive remain on leave with three expected to return to work on Monday once cleared consistent with CDC and DPH guidelines. We followed CDC and DPH protocols in response to each of these positive cases including conducting contact tracing and patient Point Prevalence Testing. The DVA’s comprehensive response to this pandemic and adherence to our COVID-19 mitigation protocols, including regular testing, wearing masks, and regular screenings of Veterans and staff are working to mitigate the spread of this virus.

DVA COVID-19 Protocols and modifications, along with all prior agency COVID-19 updates and other important information are available at: <https://portal.ct.gov/DVA/Pages/DVA-COVID-19-Updates>.