



**Enhanced Health and Safety Protocols to
Minimize Risk of Exposure to COVID-19**

Updated – April 5, 2020

In response to COVID-19, the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) began implementing in early March, a broad range of enhanced protocols for the health, safety and welfare of our Veteran Patients, Veteran Residents and Staff. The DVA has continually reevaluated, updated and adjusted these protocols since early March, consistent with clinical and operational best practices and the directives and guidelines from the State of Connecticut Department of Public Health, Office of the Governor, Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Federal VA.

In accordance with updated directives and guidelines, the following protocol updates are effective immediately:

I. Healthcare Center (HCC)

A. Travel for HCC Patients

1. All offsite travel for medical/clinical purposes are subject to the standard HCC review process for approval. All non-critical appointments will be rescheduled consistent with medical protocol.
2. Unless otherwise prohibited, all non-medical/clinical travel (i.e. “leisure travel”) is subject to a case-by-case review to determine the clinical risk to the Veteran Patient and HCC patients as a whole.
 - i. The case-by-case review will evaluate the location of the offsite activity, with whom the Veteran Patient will travel, be in contact with, and the length of offsite activity. If the assessment team determines that the activity presents an elevated risk for exposure to COVID-19, flu and virus or other illnesses of concern, the offsite activity will be denied.
 - ii. A Veteran Patient who refuses to provide the information necessary to evaluate the risk of offsite travel will be denied authorization for the requested offsite activity.
 - iii. Upon return from approved off-campus travel, the Veteran Patient shall be screened by HCC staff to determine whether the Veteran Patient’s actual travel constitutes an elevated risk of exposure to COVID-19 and, if so, the Veteran Patient is subject to isolation for 14 days as appropriate whether or not showing symptoms or risk factors for COVID-19.

- iv. The Veteran Patient will be released from isolation upon showing no symptoms or risk factors for COVID-19 consistent with CDC and State DPH guidance and after being cleared by the HCC medical director or patient's attending physician.
3. All travel is subject to any Executive Orders of the Governor of the State of Connecticut regarding COVID-19 travel restrictions and additional DVA health and safety restrictions on any non-essential travel as such travel presents an elevated risk of potential exposure to COVID-19. Any request for travel that does not comply with Executive Orders or is deemed to present an elevated risk of potential exposure to COVID-19 will be denied.
4. These travel provisions are subject to temporary complete prohibitions on travel by order of the Commissioner; any such prohibition is subject to daily review by the Commissioner.

B. No Visitors to HCC

1. No persons shall be permitted to visit the HCC.
2. Exceptions may be made on a case-by-case basis by the HCC staff for persons visiting patients in an end-of-life health state. Any such visitors are subject to risk screening and shall wear any personal protective equipment (PPE) as directed by HCC staff in accordance with CDC guidelines.
3. Any allowed visitors who refuse to abide by these measures will be denied entry to the HCC and removed from the DVA Campus.
4. DVA Veteran Residents, Veteran Vocational Therapeutic Program participants, DVA Volunteers and DVA Staff who are not required to work in the HCC (Non-HCC Staff) are subject to this restriction.

C. Admissions to HCC

1. All regular admissions to the HCC are suspended until further notice.
2. Any Veteran Patient returning to the HCC from a community based healthcare facility shall only be re-admitted once medical personnel at the healthcare facility of origin confirm in writing (email acceptable) that the patient is medically cleared which shall include at least one negative COVID-19 test and written verification that the Veteran has not been in contact with a COVID-19 positive or presumptively positive person since the time the test sample was taken.
3. The HCC shall accept a new admission only if the Veterans is an existing patient of the Federal VA, completes the required HCC admission application, has the required payer source or is 70% or more service connected disabled and medically cleared, which shall include at least one negative COVID-19 test and written verification that the Veteran has not been in contact with a COVID-19 positive or presumptively positive person since the time test sample taken.

4. Any returning patient or VA admission is subject, if deemed appropriate by HCC, to isolation for 14 days upon re-admission even if showing no symptoms or risk factors for COVID-19 and after being cleared by the HCC medical director or patient's attending physician, the patient will be released from isolation.

II. Residential Programs and Services

A. Travel and Isolation

1. All off-campus travel by Veteran Residents requires a Residential pass subject to the regular process and procedures for obtaining a pass in addition to the procedures set forth in these protocols.
2. All off-campus travel is subject to the restrictions of Executive Orders of the Governor of the State of Connecticut regarding COVID-19 and additional DVA health and safety restrictions on any non-essential travel as such travel presents an elevated risk of potential exposure to COVID-19.
3. All Veteran Residents are required to complete an Enhanced Travel Screening Information Form when requesting a pass to leave campus and upon return to campus so that Residential Staff may evaluate the risk of exposure to the COVID-19 virus. Any Veteran Resident whose requested off-campus is not essential or presents an elevated risk of exposure to COVID-19 will not be issued a pass.
4. If a Veteran Resident leaves the DVA Campus without a valid pass, the Veteran Resident will not be permitted to return to the Campus unless the Veteran Resident has an acceptable current medical COVID-19 test establishing that the Veteran Resident does not have COVID-19 and written verification that the Veteran has not been in contact with a COVID-19 positive or presumptively positive person since the time the test sample was taken. If the Veteran Resident does not provide the required medical information, the Veteran Resident may only return to Campus on a case-by-case basis if asymptomatic for COVID-19 and agrees to be placed in isolation for 14 days and only released after being cleared by the Veterans Outpatient Clinic (VOC). Refusal to remain in isolation is a major violation and shall be grounds for immediate involuntary discharge from the DVA Residential Program. The involuntary discharge will result in the immediate removal of the Veteran Resident from Campus without appeal and notification to State health officials of the Veteran Resident's departure from the DVA Campus.
5. A Veteran Resident with a valid pass who returns to the DVA Campus and whose travel, including to an off-campus event, is determined upon return to present an elevated risk of having been exposed to the COVID-19 virus shall be placed in isolation for 14 days and released after being cleared by the VOC. Refusal to remain in isolation is a major violation and shall be grounds for immediate involuntary discharge from the DVA Residential Program. The involuntary discharge will result in the immediate removal of the Veteran Resident from Campus without appeal and notification to State health officials of the Veteran Resident's departure from the DVA Campus.

6. All travel off-campus is subject to temporary complete prohibitions on travel by order of the Commissioner. Travel will be suspended to protect the health, safety and welfare of Veteran Residents, Patients and Staff. Any such prohibition is subject to daily review by the Commissioner, and notice will be provided to the residents informing the residents of the prohibition and review by the Commissioner.
7. Irrespective of travel, any Veteran Resident showing symptoms or risk factors for COVID-19 shall be placed in isolation for up to 14 days unless a higher level of medical care is needed. The Veteran Resident shall be released from isolation upon receiving medical clearance in accordance with CDC and State DPH guidelines and directives. Refusal to remain in isolation is a major violation and shall be grounds for immediate involuntary discharge from the DVA Residential Program. The involuntary discharge may result in the removal of the Veteran Resident from Campus without appeal and notification to State health officials of the Veteran Resident's departure from the DVA Campus.

B. Isolation Unit

1. The DVA has established a 12-room Isolation Unit in the D-Wing. This isolation unit includes a self-contained HVAC system and lavatory. The isolation unit is divided to handle, in separate sections, Veterans who test positive for COVID-19, Veterans with COVID-19 symptoms awaiting test results and Veterans without symptoms who had contact with a COVID-19 positive or presumptively positive person and who are awaiting test results. DVA clinical staff will take appropriate measures regarding referral for hospitalization if necessary.
2. Meals, medication, and hydration is provided to Veterans in the Isolation Unit and each Veteran is monitored.
3. The DVA Facilities Staff has implemented sterilization methods and products and utilize PPE as needed for cleaning of the Isolation Unit.
4. Those Veterans in isolation without a mobile phone, smart device or laptop computer will be provided with a phone and smart tablet based on availability.
5. All staff entering the Isolation Unit shall wear proper PPE.

C. Recreational Activities and Community Events

1. All group recreational activities on and off campus, in which social distancing is not possible, are suspended until further notice.
2. Travel to community based groups, events or activities organized by or coordinated with the DVA are suspended.
3. The DVA shall develop alternative recreational opportunities on the DVA Campus that are compliant with recommended social distancing.

D. Admissions and Visitors to Residential Facility

1. All regular admissions to the DVA Residential Program are suspended until further notice.
2. Any Veteran Resident who is returning to the Residential Facility from a community based healthcare facility shall only be re-admitted once medical personnel at the healthcare facility of origin confirm in writing (email acceptable) that the patient is medically cleared and has at least one negative COVID-19 test and written verification that the Veteran has not been in contact with a COVID-19 positive or presumptively positive person since the time the test sample was taken.
3. Any returning Veteran Resident may also be subject to isolation for 14 days upon re-admission if deemed appropriate by DVA Staff even if showing no symptoms or risk factors for COVID-19, and after being cleared by the VOC, the resident will be released from isolation. Refusal to remain in isolation is a major violation and shall be grounds for immediate involuntary discharge from the DVA Residential Program. The involuntary discharge will result in the immediate removal of the Veteran Resident from Campus without appeal and notification to State health officials of the Veteran Resident's departure from the DVA Campus.
4. The Residential Program shall accept a new admission only if the Veteran is an existing patient of the Federal VA, completes the required admission application and is medically cleared which shall include at least one negative COVID-19 test and written verification that the Veteran has not been in contact with a COVID-19 positive or presumptively positive person since the time the test sample was taken.
5. New admissions from the Federal VA may also be subject to isolation for 14 days upon admission if deemed appropriate by DVA Staff even if showing no symptoms or risk factors for COVID-19, and after being cleared by the VOC, the resident will be released from isolation. Refusal to remain in isolation is a major violation and shall be grounds for immediate involuntary discharge from the DVA Residential Program. The involuntary discharge will result in the immediate removal of the Veteran Resident from Campus without appeal and notification to State health officials of the Veteran Resident's departure from the DVA Campus.
6. All visitors will be restricted from the Residential Facility. This includes Veteran Patients, any persons otherwise lawfully on the DVA Campus such as members and clients of DVA tenant organizations, and DVA Staff not assigned or working in the Residential Facility. Exceptions may be made by the DVA Senior Staff on a case-by-case basis.

III. Visitors Restricted and Delivery of Personal Items Controlled

A. Visitors Restricted from Campus

1. Except as otherwise specifically permitted herein, no visitors shall be permitted at the DVA Campus. Only persons on campus for operational purposes of the DVA or its tenant organizations will be permitted. Exceptions will be made on a case-by-case basis as determined by DVA Senior Staff.
2. Persons with official business with the DVA or its tenant organizations may be permitted on campus only if they are unable, as determined by the DVA, to reschedule or conduct their business by electronic means or by mail. Any such person shall be screened by Security at the entrance gate for risk elements of possible exposure or symptoms of COVID-19. Any visitor who refuses to respond to the screening questions shall be denied entry to the DVA Campus. Any such person deemed a risk by the DVA shall be denied entry to the campus. Visitors can refer to the DVA website for contact information: <https://portal.ct.gov/dva>. These protocols apply to persons being interviewed for possible employment at the DVA.

B. Vendors and Transportation Providers Are Included in Restriction

1. No food or other vendor deliveries are permitted to the DVA Campus except for those deliveries by State vendors in support of DVA or tenant operations. No DVA Veteran Resident, Patient or Staff member may order any food or other items to be delivered to the DVA Campus except by common carrier.
2. This restriction prohibits meeting any prohibited vendors at or near the DVA security gate. DVA Security are directed to turn away any such vendors immediately.
3. The DVA is not liable for any losses by any person on the DVA Campus who orders food or other deliveries in violation of this protocol.
4. All Uber vehicles, taxi-cabs or other non-state government transportation providers are prohibited from the Campus. Exceptions may be made on a case-by-case basis by a DVA Departmental Manager (e.g. Director of Residential Programs and Services) for Veterans requiring transportation for employment. In such cases the drivers will be screened by DVA Security for risk of exposure or symptoms of COVID-19.
5. The DVA is not liable for any losses by any person on the DVA Campus who requests a transportation service in violation of this protocol.

C. Meetings and Interviews Via Alternative Electronic Means

1. DVA Personnel may conduct meetings, interviews and other similar activities via alternative electronic platforms such as FaceTime, Video Teleconference and other similar means on both State and personal equipment.

2. While telephonic and video interface is allowed on personal IT equipment, no materials, documents or other records are to be made on personal IT equipment.

D. Drop Off of Personal Items for Veteran Patients and Residents

1. To facilitate the safe and secure provision of personal items to DVA Veteran Patients and Residents while minimizing contact between DVA Security and third parties, any person dropping off items must contact the HCC, Residential Programs or Administration in advance to inform the appropriate parties of the items being dropped off and for whom they are intended. If Security is not able to confirm this information, the items are not permitted to be dropped off.
2. All permitted items are to be labeled and provided to DVA security pursuant to enhanced safety protocols, which may include placing the item in a bin at the DVA main entrance. The drop-off will be documented by Security to include name and plate number of vehicle to the greatest extent possible. The items will be delivered to appropriate parties by HCC and Residential staff based on availability.
3. The DVA will effectuate the delivery of such items in a timely fashion subject and subordinate to health and safety protocols and DVA operational needs.
4. Veteran Residents are asked to follow these procedures for dropping off items to Campus. Residents may drop off items in the bins at the DVA main entrance for pick-up by others and may retrieve items from the bins left for the residents by following these procedures and adhering to social distancing recommendations. All items dropped off or picked up by Veteran Residents are subject to inspection by Security.

IV. Group Events and Training Sessions on Campus

All group events, meetings and training activities on the DVA Campus by the DVA, State and municipal agencies, and community based entities are suspended until further notice.

V. Follow CDC and CT DPH Hygienic and Social Distancing Guidelines

- A. The DVA has instructed all Veteran Residents, Patients and Staff to follow all CDC and CT Public Health hygienic and social distancing guidelines to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. This information is regularly disseminated to Veterans and Staff and is posted around the Campus.
- B. These hygienic and social distancing procedures are communicated by hardcopy, electronically, and verbally in addition to posting signs across campus in each building with this information.
- C. The DVA has increased disinfecting and cleaning across the Campus.

VI. Main Dining Room Social Distancing & Protective Equipment

- A. DVA Food Services shall implement, in coordination with Residential Programs and services, procedures for social distancing in the Main Dining Room.

- B. These procedures shall include spacing of tables and chairs, installing protective Plexiglas shields in food service areas, when necessary and with the approval of the Commissioner, staggered meal times for Residential Wings.

VII. Screening of Veteran Residents, Patients and Staff

- A. All HCC Patients and Staff shall be screened daily by a HCP (Healthcare Personnel) for symptoms and risk factors for COVID-19, contacts directly and indirectly with PUIs (persons under investigation), and body temperature check. All HCC staff shall be screened at the beginning of each shift.
- B. All Veteran Residents shall be screened by a HCP on a rotating basis for symptoms and risk factors for COVID-19, contacts directly and indirectly with PUIs, and body temperature check.
- C. All Veteran Residents shall be additionally screened by Residential Staff on a case-by-case basis in accordance with Federal and State guidance and directives, which shall include a full screening with body temperature check.
- D. All Residential and other DVA Staff shall be screened daily at the beginning of each shift in accordance with Federal and State guidance and directives, which shall include a full screening with body temperature check.
- E. The DVA shall implement and update as necessary internal procedures based on Federal and State guidance and directives to conduct the screenings.
- F. All staff shall follow CDC and State DPH guidance related to responding to suspected cases of COVID-19.

VIII. Inspections of Vehicles and Residential Living Areas

- A. The DVA Staff is cognizant of the increased stress and related mental health issues impacting our Veterans related to COVID-19 which can lead to increased substance abuse, as evidenced by recent events involving contraband on the Campus.
- B. In order to protect the health, safety and welfare of our Veteran Residents, Patients and Staff, the DVA has implemented a Temporary Residential Inspection Policy which supplements the inspection protocols in the current Residential Omnibus Policy Update dated January 17, 2020.
- C. The Temporary Residential Inspection Policy is subject to ongoing review and adjustment at the direction of the DVA Commissioner.

IX. Executive Orders

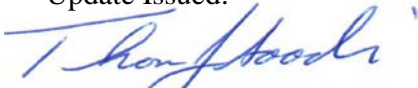
- A. All applicable Executive Orders of the Governor of the State of Connecticut regarding the COVID-19 are incorporated herein by reference and as may be changed from time to time.
- B. All DVA Staff, Veteran Residents and Patients are required to comply with any such Executive Order and failure to do so shall be deemed a violation of DVA rules.

X. Appendices to Protocols

- A. Divisions within the DVA shall develop, as appropriate, written procedures to implement and support the Enhanced Health and Safety Protocols. These procedures shall be issued as appendices to these protocols and are incorporated herein by reference.
- B. Any such procedure may be updated separately without issuing an update to these protocols in order to allow flexibility and timely adjustments at the operational level.

These protocols are temporary enhanced protective measures, subject to ongoing review and updates and will remain in effect until rescinded or amended by the DVA Commissioner, consistent with further directives and guidance from Federal, State and healthcare officials and clinical best practices based on developments regarding the COVID-19 virus.

Update Issued:



Thomas J. Saadi
Commissioner

Date: April 5, 2020



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Appendices to Enhanced Health and Safety Protocols
to Minimize Risk of Exposure to COVID-19

Appendix A: Residential D-Wing Isolation Procedures

Appendix B: Main Dining Room and Meal Procedures




APPENDIX A

COVID-19 RESIDENTIAL D-WING ISOLATION PROCEDURES

1. Any Veteran Resident who is COVID-19 Positive, is symptomatic or has been in close contact with a COVID-19 positive person is subject to isolation in D-Wing. Close contact is defined as sustained contact within 6 feet for 5 minutes or more.
2. Residents who are subject to D-Wing Isolation will be categorized as follows:
 - Green – COVID-19 Negative, less than 14 days
 - Yellow- Asymptomatic, awaiting test
 - Orange- Symptomatic awaiting test
 - Red – COVID-19 positive

Residents will be isolated in the section of D-Wing corresponding to the designation of green, yellow, orange or red.

3. Asymptomatic residents are to remain in isolation for 14 days and may be released after 14 days upon showing no symptoms, or sooner with negative testing pursuant to CDC guidelines.
4. Symptomatic residents or those who test positive for COVID-19 are to remain in isolation for up to 14 days but may be released sooner based on CDC guidelines with negative testing. However, residents may not be released any sooner than 7 days since first symptom appeared and must be asymptomatic for 3 days without the use of medication or medical interventions.
5. Residents will be monitored by Residential Staff in consultation with the Veterans Outpatient Clinic with appropriate social distancing and personal protective equipment (PPE) as needed and per CDC guidelines.
6. Any symptomatic or COVID-10 positive resident who requires additional medical treatment shall be transferred to an appropriate outside medical facility for further treatment and care.
7. For purposes of providing meals and beverages to Veteran Residents in D-Wing, the Directors of Residential Programs and Services and of Food Services have established procedures to provide these items in a safe manner and will provide PPE to staff as needed.
8. For purposes of cleaning D-Wing lavatory and common areas, DVA facilities staff has developed an action plan which includes utilizing proper PPE and sterilizing products and methods.
9. Latrine utilization- Residents in D-Wing will utilize the wing latrine as follows: Green and Yellow categories will utilize the left entry door and left side. Orange and Red categories will utilize the right entry door and right side.
10. These procedures are subject to continual review and updates according to CDC and State DPH guidelines.


Thomas J. Saadi
Commissioner

Update: April 5, 2020



APPENDIX B

COVID-19 MAIN DINING ROOM (MDR) AND MEAL PROCEDURES

Dated: April 5, 2020

A. MDR

1. The Director of Food Services and the Director of Residential Programs and Services have collaborated to set up the Main Dining Room in such a way for Veteran Residents to adhere to social distancing recommendations and minimize risk of exposure to COVID-19.
2. The tables in the MDR have been spaced apart and set up to allow for only two Veteran Residents per table.
3. Only one resident is permitted at a time through the meal service line.
4. Floor markings have been placed to identify 6 foot social distancing.
5. Facilities staff have installed Plexiglas Shields in the food line to afford an extra layer of protection.
6. Meal services are offered in a staggered schedule based on Residential Wings in order to control the flow and number of Veteran Residents in the MDR during meal service.
7. All Grab-and-Go items have been eliminated from MDR self-service program. Items are still available- Veteran Residents are required to ask for single serve items. Appropriate signage has been posted.

B. Meals for D-Wing Isolation Unit

1. Veteran Outpatient Clinic (VOC) or Residential staff will notify Food & Nutrition staff when a Residential Veteran has been admitted into the isolation room. The following meals are available for residents in the D-Wing:
 - a. Hot Meal in a Clam Shell To-Go Container
 - b. Bagged Cold Lunch
 - c. Full Liquid Diet
2. Food service staff will prepare meals according to VOC request.
3. Residential Staff will pick up meals and deliver to VOC prior to doing wellness checks. A meal cart can be used if multiple meals are being delivered. If it becomes necessary to keep all residents out of the MDR, then the meals will be assembled in a meal cart and delivered to residents by Residential staff.
4. D-Wing Isolation meals are prepared by Food Services staff and delivered on disposable trays and packaging material.

C. Review and Updates

These procedures are subject to continual review and updates per state and federal guidelines and directives and are implemented for the health, safety and welfare of Veteran Residents, Patients and Staff.