Beating the Flu

Influenza (Flu Virus) – Get your Flu Shot to combat the spread

In order to protect Veterans, reduce illness and prevent the spread of the flu, the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System and Walgreens are now providing enrolled Veterans no-cost flu vaccinations.

Locally at the VA within the Las Vegas Valley and Pahrump, Veterans can get their flu shots during any scheduled appointment or by visiting the patient aligned care team (PACT) at their local VA clinic during regular business hours. VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System will also host a large flu clinic to provide shots to Veterans and employees at the North Las Vegas VA Medical Center Auditorium, located at 6900 N. Pecos Road, N. Las Vegas, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Oct. 18-19 and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Oct. 20.

For Veterans who reside in and around Laughlin or who don’t want to travel to a VA facility, the VA is also providing availability of the Quadrivalent flu vaccinations for VA-enrolled Veterans via a VA partnership with Walgreens through March 31. (NOTE: Quadrivalent flu shots are the only immunization covered by the VA under this partnership). For more information on the Walgreens partnership with the VA click here: VA-RCCP FAQs

In addition to immunizations, another step in reducing transmission of the flu is to know how the flu virus is spread. Normally the virus is spread in the form of droplets from person to person. Covering a sneeze or cough with the crook of your elbow can prevent the spread of these germs. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth as these areas of the body are susceptible to the spread of the virus into the bloodstream. A third step in preventing and spreading the flu is to clean surfaces and hands with warm soap and water and hand sanitizers. Germs can live on these items for up to 48 hours and cleaning most often handled items like cellphones, doorknobs, laptops, faucets, and light switches can reduce transmission of the virus. Finally, if one does contract the flu, he or she should stay home to prevent spreading the disease. Most studies agree that a person is most contagious up to five days from the time symptoms, which may include slight fever, sore throat, cough, weakness, body aches, stuffy nose, and nausea appear. VA providers agree that antiviral medications, rest and plenty of fluids are best to combat the flu and lessen the severity of health complications.

Flu Facts

- The flu vaccine will not give you the flu.
- The flu is caused by a virus. It can’t be treated with antibiotics.
- The flu can be life-threatening, especially for people in high-risk groups. This includes the very young, the elderly, and people with weakened immune systems. Approximately 36,000 people die of complications from the flu each year.
- Influenza is not the same as “stomach flu,” the 24-hour bug that causes vomiting and diarrhea. This is most likely due to a GI (gastrointestinal) infection—not the flu.
Holiday Food Safety

During the holidays, practice food safety to prevent food borne illness.

Hands. Wash your hands with soap and water frequently, and especially before and after preparing food, after touching raw meat, poultry, eggs, unwashed produce, and before eating and drinking.

Cook Thoroughly. A food thermometer is only way to ensure meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs have been cooked to temperatures to kill bacteria-causing illness. Purchase at your local grocery store and follow the guidelines for each food – guidelines range from 140 degrees for pre-cooked foods to 165 degrees for roasts.

Danger Zone. The longer food sets in the danger zone (40 to 140 degrees), the more bacteria grow and once consumed can cause food-borne illness. Never leave cold food out of refrigeration more than 2 hours. And if the temperature is above 90 degrees, food should not be left out more than 1 hour.

Separate Foods. Raw foods like meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs can contaminate other foods in your refrigerator, especially those that are not cooked before consuming. Keep these products at bottom of the refrigerator or in a sealed bag to prevent juices leaking.

Raw Egg and Flour. Cook eggs until firm. For any dishes containing raw (uncooked) eggs, use pasteurized egg products. Salmonella can live on the outside and inside of eggs. Never eat dough and batter (cookie dough, biscuits, cake batter). Not only can the raw eggs carry Salmonella, the raw flour is not treated for bacteria like E.coli. In 2016, there were 63 cases of E.coli linked to raw flour!

A Healthy Choice:
Avocados are a good source of B vitamins, which help you fight off disease and infection. They also give you vitamins C and E, plus natural plant chemicals that may help prevent cancer. Avocados are high in fat. But it’s monounsaturated fat, which is a “good” fat that helps lower bad cholesterol, as long as you eat them in moderation.

Holiday Cooking Tip:
Safely Thaw Your Turkey! Thaw frozen meat in the refrigerator (and plan for several days), in a sink of cold water changed every 30 minutes, or in the microwave directly before you cook it. Avoid thawing on the counter without temperature control to prevent the rapid growth of bacteria.

USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline: 1-888-MPHotline
Breast Cancer Awareness

Recommended screenings key to early detection, treatment

VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System treated nearly 5,600 woman Veteran patients in fiscal 2017, an increase of 10 percent increase over last year. Women’s related health care has never been more needed. The VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System Women’s Health Center has coordinated new care efforts to women Veterans of Southern Nevada to include the early detection of breast cancer.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, 200,000 women get breast cancer and more than 40,000 die from the disease. Men can also get breast cancer, but is not as common with only one percent reported of all breast cancers in the U.S. The main factors that can influence the chance of breast cancer include, women over the age of 50, breast cancer genes BRCA1 and BRCA2 changes, and family health histories of breast cancer. It is recommended that women have early detection examinations from the age of 50 to 74 every two years.

Women Veterans are encouraged to speak with their primary care provider or the Women Health Center about getting a breast cancer screening. The type of exam varies according to age, genetic, lifestyle and other risk factors. When breast cancers are detected in their very early stage, when they still have not triggered any symptom, chances of a successful treatment are much higher. Early cancers are likely to be smaller in size and to have not spread beyond the breast. Women Veterans in their 20s and 30s should have a health exam every year and the clinical breast exam (CBE) every three years. During the CBE, the health care provider checks manually and visually the breasts, underarms and collarbone areas for abnormalities or warning signs. An experienced professional may detect suspicious areas overlooked by the patient. Women Veterans age 40 or older should have a health exam and a CBE every year, and a mammogram yearly or every other year depending on risk factors. The mammogram can often show a breast lump before it can be felt. In this case, additional tests will be performed such as an ultrasound or a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI).

Women Veterans at high risk (20 percent) should get a MRI screening every year. Magnetic energy and radio waves (not radiation) will scan through the tissue and draw a detailed picture of the breast. Based on the outcome image, the medical team can distinguish normal and diseased tissue. Women Veterans at moderately increased risk (15 to 20 percent) should talk with their doctors about adding a MRI screening to their yearly mammogram. Women Veterans at 15 percent or less risk are not recommended an annual MRI.

Mammography

Mammography is an X-ray exam of your breast tissue. The image produced is called a mammogram. A mammogram can help detect problems with your breasts, such as cysts or cancer.

Before Your Test
Schedule the test for one week after your period, when your breasts are less tender. Make sure your clinic gets your last mammogram if it was done somewhere else. This lets the health care provider compare the two. On the morning of your test, wash our breasts and underarms, but don’t use deodorant, powder, or perfume. Wear a top that you can remove easily.

During Your Test
You will need to undress from the waist up. The technologist will usually give you a gown to wear and ask you to keep the opening in the front. The technologist will position your breast to get the best test results. Each of your breasts will be compressed. This helps get the most complete X-ray image.

After Your Test
More X-rays are sometimes needed. You may be called to schedule them or have them done at the same time. You should be notified of your test results in writing. Ask about this on the day of your appointment. Get your mammography done as often as your health care provider recommends.

Healthy Living
Healthy Living Matters. Prevention Works.

Talk to your VASNHS Primary Care Provider or for more information go to:
Suicide Prevention: #BeThere

VA is coordinating with communities and partners nationwide to let Veterans and their loved ones know that support is available whenever, if ever they need it.

“We are not only guided by the statistics, but also the Veterans we see each and every day in our healthcare system,” said Peggy Kearns, Director of the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System. “It’s up to all of us to learn how we can jump into action if we speak to someone who needs support.”

In August 2016, VA released a national suicide data report, Suicide Among Veterans and Other Americans, 2001–2014. The report was the most comprehensive analysis of Veteran suicide rates in the United States, examining more than 55 million records from 1979 to 2014.

The data indicated:

- An average of 20 Veterans died from suicide each day. Only 6 of the 20 were users of VA health services in 2014.
- Veterans accounted for 18% of all deaths from suicide among U.S. adults, while Veterans constituted 8.5% of the US population.
- Approximately 67% of all Veteran deaths from suicide were the result of firearms.

“One call, one chat, or one text can open the door to hope.” said Kearns.

The VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System offers many services for Veterans locally, including same-day access to primary care and mental health services during regular business hours for Veterans with urgent needs, 24/7 access to emergency services, resources for homeless Veterans, mental health counseling and special programs for women Veterans and Veterans of operations Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn. The health care system also offers access to same-day services for Veterans with urgent mental health needs.

For more information on VA’s Suicide Prevention resources, visit these websites: https://www.veteranscrisisline.net https://maketheconnection.net www.va.gov.

Important VA resources include the Veteran Crisis Line, 1-800-273-8255, Press 1; online chat at https://www.veteranscrisisline.net, and texting to 838255.

Suicide Prevention and Peer Support Program

This display was put together by our very own VASNHS Peer Support Specialist & U.S. Army Veteran Mr. Kevin Watson to bring awareness to suicide prevention and encourage open conversation.

Please don’t hesitate to reach out and ask for help if you or a loved one is struggling by calling the Veteran Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 (press 1) or walk in to any clinic for help.

- VASNHS Peer Support Specialist Geri Hunt with display
Pain Management

Treating Pain with Opioid Alternative Approaches
- Dr. Lynn Ansher

Chronic opioid use for treatment of pain has led to a number of drastic health outcomes. It is recommended by providers across the nation to reduce chronic opioid use to treat pain. Opioid treatment for non-cancer chronic pain should be evaluated carefully on a patient by patient basis.

Several options exist within a VA comprehensive pain treatment program. These may include adaptive sports, physical therapy, kinesiotherapy, osteo-manipulative therapy, aquatic therapies, and injections. Cognitive-Behavioral therapy is a patient-centered therapy, and complementary therapies include acupuncture, chiropractic care, Tai Chi or yoga. In addition, dietitians and chaplains may also provide additional support with nutrition and spirituality that can play an important role in healing.

Long-term opioid use can cause side effects that are potentially life-threatening, such as slowed breathing rate.

Some individuals are at higher risk for developing substance abuse behaviors, including becoming physically and psychologically dependent, and even have suicidal thoughts and behaviors. The goal of VA is to use a comprehensive plan to assist Veterans with managing pain and learning tools to improve overall health and maintain improved well-being. Other options may include community programs such as art, adaptive sports, and volunteering to encourage patients to focus on other activities to reduce pain.

Fisher House:
A Light in the Darkness

A spouse of a Veteran recently stayed at the Fisher House and described the Fisher House as an “amazing place” that “gives warmth, hope, help, and knowing others care.” This spouse went on to say, “at our darkest times there is light.”

The daughter of a Veteran shared, “I didn’t know where I would stay... a blessing fell in my hands when the nurse told me to stay at this house. It feels like a home and gives me comfort after long days at the hospital. We don’t have any family, but I find there is a family here.”

The Fisher House is a “home away from home” for families of Veterans who travel to the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System from at least 50 miles away for inpatient or extended outpatient care. Veterans, family members or caregivers can call the Fisher House directly at 702-224-6789 to find out if they are eligible for free lodging at the Fisher House.

The Fisher House relies on Volunteers and donations from our community to support the families who stay at Fisher House. If you are interested in helping to support the Fisher House mission, please contact the Fisher House to find out how you can help. The Fisher House website: http://fisherhouselnv.webs.com
Telehealth: Improving Healthcare through Technology

Improving access through virtual health

Written by: Cyra Torres-Diaz, RN, BSN, MSN - RN Telehealth Program Coordinator

Telehealth is an enhancement to health care and is defined as the ability to use technology and telecommunications to deliver health care. This fast-growing trend in health care is a comprehensive approach, positively affecting Veteran care by improving access and increasing satisfaction. Telehealth programs deliver innovative care by providing a safe connection in a secured virtual medical room.

Services include treatment for PTSD, pain, and a variety of other mental health conditions. Telehealth services are offered at the primary care clinics, including Laughlin and Pahrump. Home telehealth programs are also available to provide daily nursing support to Veterans with PTSD, depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia. Home telehealth support is also available for patients interested in quitting smoking.

A new home telehealth program was recently initiated to support caregivers for Veterans with dementia. The newest trend in telehealth is VA Video Connect, which is a virtual medical room where the Veteran can see and talk to a mental health care provider in real time while in the comfort of their own home using the Internet.

The mental health care provider can diagnosis and treat many non-emergent conditions as well as discuss collaboratively the Veterans’ plan of care or follow up without the Veteran coming in for a hospital or office visit. To schedule a tele-mental health visit, first discuss this with your primary care or mental health team. If tele-mental health is right for you then your health care provider can place a consult.

For more information on Telehealth services: 702-791-9000, x18946
75th Anniversary Commemoration

WWII 2016 - 2020

- Written by Dexter Provido

2016 commemorates the 75th Anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor, an event which propelled the United States into World War II. Throughout the four years that follow, significant battles and historic moments from World War II have etched their place in history. Here is Mr. Allen D. Panowich’s story:

“I’m no hero.” said Panowich. At the age of 101 years old, this World War II Veteran represents living history. He was there to experience the intensity of being caught in between the German counteroffensive and the Allies’ surging momentum during the Battle of the Bulge in 1944.

Born in 1916, two years before the end of the first World War, Panowich bestowed upon his amazing encounters during World War II. What he said about his life demonstrated alone, his significant contribution to living Americana, as well as rooting down world history that will be remembered for generations. With 650 of General Eisenhower’s vehicles under this Staff Sergeant’s control, his camp was trapped in the middle of Ardennes -- between allied and German forces. It was a desperate struggle holding off the German offensive, which gave the young Veteran a rising distress on how he was supposed to disperse his forces. Tensions were at their very limit in this no man’s land; nothing less was expected from one of the worst battles in U.S. history. Battle of the Bulge wasn’t the end, or the beginning of the tales of his life. He arrived in Normandy and fell upon the aftermath of D-Day. The 28-year old had to spend three days in fixed waters before he was able to reach solid ground. Although the victory of the allies was a triumph, Panowich was far from receiving a warm welcome. He claims the sights he saw were memories he would never forget.

When asked if he received any badges or medals of honor, he offered this story: He and his comrades tried to have fun when they could, especially when there’s a little alcohol on the line. One day, they snuck out across a field to find supplies that were rumored to contain bottles of wine. They didn’t even know if the field was mined! The next thing he noticed, his entire company was driving away in the opposite direction. When he caught up to his convoy, his captain devised a suitable punishment: Embarrassment! A giant “P” was placed on his back, along with a guard that accompanied him for days.

Panowich will soon be visiting The Holocaust Memorial Museum in D.C., where his pictures are on display. The endless stories that Allen D. Panowich offered, provided recognition to where it’s rightfully deserved. American soldiers have a life like no other, and the sacrifices are incomparable to any type. Panowich perfectly displays the one of a kind integrity and loyalty that so strongly defines our nation’s Veteran; defending the freedom and being part of the Greatest Generation. Mr. Panowich, enrolling into the VA for the first time, contacted Audiology and was able to be seen without a primary care referral under the Direct Scheduling Program.

Upcoming Events Oct - Dec 2017 (Go to www.lasvegas.va.gov for current dates & times)

11 Oct - Veterans Service Fair – Las Vegas NV
14 Oct - Breast Cancer Awareness Dragon Boat Races, Las Vegas NV
19 Oct - 2017 Veterans Stand Down – Pahrump NV
18-20 Oct - Flu Shot Clinic for Employees/Veterans in VAMC Auditorium
20 Oct - Annual Jay Marshall VIP (Visual Impaired Putters) Tournament
21 Oct - Las Vegas Vet Center Grand Re-Opening
25 Oct - WHC Breast & Ovarian Cancer Awareness Event @ VAMC Auditorium
25 Oct - Quarterly Veterans Town Hall in VAMC Auditorium
10 Nov - VASNHS Veterans Day Car Show & BBQ
20 Dec - Cookies with Mrs. Claus, VA Voluntary Service Event

If you are a Veteran enrolled in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system, the Veteran Appointment Request mobile application (app) allows you to self-schedule or request primary care appointments and request mental health appointments. You can also view appointment details, track the status of requests, send messages about the requested appointments and get notifications about appointments and cancel appointments.

For directions go to: https://mobile.va.gov/appstore/veterans
Special Events

Veterans Day Event and Quarterly Town Hall

The Department of Veterans Affairs will hold its quarterly Veterans Town Hall Oct 25 2017, which includes a VA Information Fair from 5-6 p.m. and moderated Town Hall from 6-7 p.m.

The VA information Fair will include information tables, as well as other displays and information for Veterans, their families and caregivers.

The Town Hall will include updates from Veterans Health Care and Veterans Benefits leaders on national and local activities and initiatives, followed by a question and answer session where leaders will answer pre-submitted questions or questions of general interest submitted on a comment card during the session.

Veterans can submit questions in advance to: vhalaspao@va.gov
Questions of a personal nature or those unable to be addressed during the town hall will be sent to the appropriate representative for a direct response back to the submitter.

(Note: Listing of participating non-government organizations is for informational purposes only and does not infer or imply endorsement by the Department of Veterans Affairs)

For the latest information in the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System check out the following web links:

- VASNHS Website
- Free Email Alerts

Scan here to sign up!

For videos:

- VASNHS YouTube

Scan here for videos!