

# Veterans' Health Today

WINTER 2008



**Coming to Blows  
with the Flu**

**What to do When  
Your Bill is Past Due**

**Commit to Quit!**

**VA DESERT PACIFIC  
HEALTHCARE NETWORK**



**Department of  
Veterans Affairs**

# The Battle of the Bug: Coming to Blows with the **FLU**

**You feel hot,** and then cold. Your head pounds, your muscles ache, and your chest hurts from coughing, but you're too tired to care! Sound familiar? If so, then you are part of the 10-20 percent of the population that catches the flu each year.

While the average flu only lasts a few days, some people can become very sick and end up in the hospital. Approximately 200,000 people with the flu are admitted to hospitals each year. However, for those over the age of 65, the flu shot has decreased the risk of flu-related death by 48 percent. Although this age group is the most easily affected by the flu, many are not aware of the risks and aren't getting their flu shot.

People with heart and lung conditions have an increased chance of flu related problems, and left untreated, the flu can develop into more serious infections, such as pneumonia. Many of the signs of pneumonia are similar to the flu, such as fever, cough, aches, pains, and weakness. As this infection attacks and the body becomes weakened, elderly adults, those with chronic sickness, and residents of nursing homes are at an even higher risk of serious illness or death. Rest is the most important aid to recovery, but there is also a vaccine available to protect against bacterial pneumonia. Call your VA provider for more information.

However, one of the best ways to prevent serious illness is to start by getting your flu shot. Getting a flu shot can not only prevent the flu, but it may keep those who are high-risk in good health throughout the flu season. Follow these tips to help fight the flu:

- ▶ Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- ▶ Wash your hands often.
- ▶ Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- ▶ Practice good health habits, like getting enough rest, exercising, drinking plenty of water, and eating healthy foods.

If you begin to notice any flu symptoms, call your VA provider right away. Early treatment can keep the flu from getting worse and will get you back on your feet to enjoy the winter season.

**The Center for Disease Control (CDC)** states that "The single best way to protect against the flu is to get vaccinated each year."

Flu viruses are always changing, so getting an annual flu shot is a good idea since shots are only good for one year.

An average of **226,000** people stay in the hospital each year due to the flu.

**36,000** people die each year from the flu.

Research shows the flu shot decreases the risk of flu-related death in those over the age of 65 by **48 percent**.

There are **five** main causes of pneumonia: bacteria, viruses, mycoplasmas, other infectious agents, such as fungi, and various chemicals.

If you are enrolled in VA health care, you are eligible to get a flu shot and a pneumonia shot from your nearest VA medical center.

In 2003, pneumonia and flu combined ranked as the **seventh** leading cause of death.

For more tips and facts about flu prevention, check out My Health@Vet at

**[www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov)**

# Overdue Concern:

## What to Do When Your Bill is

**W**hen you or a family member must deal with health problems, paying your VA copay bills is not always an easy task. For this reason, VA has different payment options that are available to veterans to help their peace of mind—and their bank account. Many payment plans are offered to fit the needs of veterans on a case-by-case basis. If you are having financial difficulties, here are a few types of assistance available to you:

### Repayment Plan

If you can't afford to pay your entire VA bill, you can apply for this payment option. When you apply you will be required to send in an initial payment (called a "good faith" payment), and then pay a set dollar amount each month until the bill is paid in full.

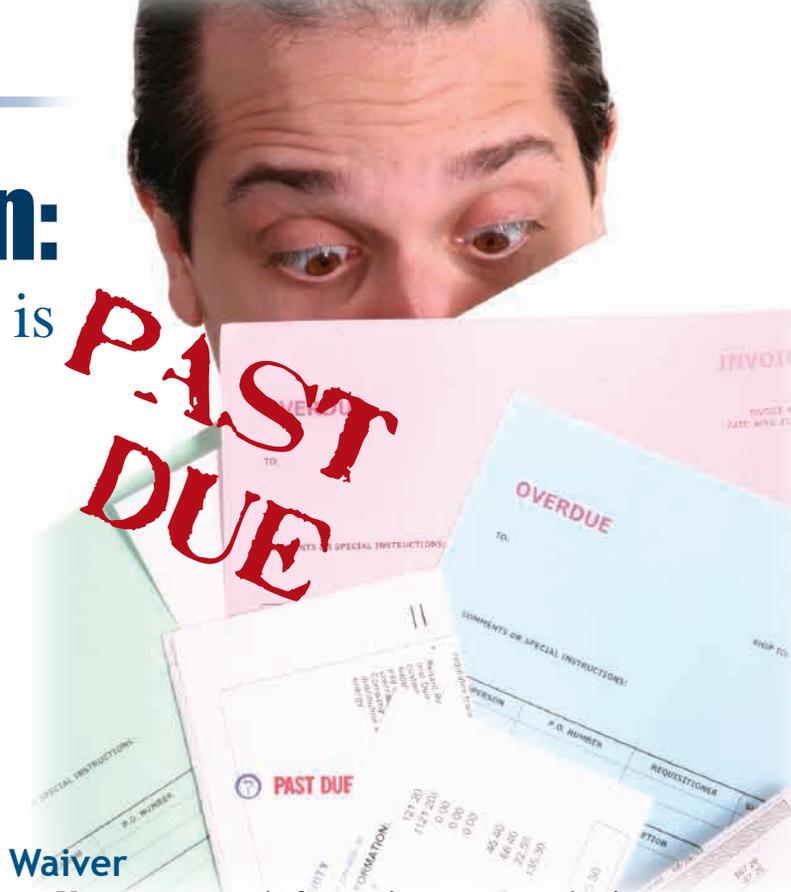
### Hardship

Although this option does not apply to past debt, you can apply for a hardship if you are expecting that your income is going to drop in the upcoming year. This drop in income may be due to an event such as job loss, illness, or bankruptcy.

## Has There Been a Change to Your VA Eligibility?

Have you recently received a change in your service connection or VA pension?

Notify your local VA Medical Center Patient Business Office immediately! You could be paying unnecessary co-payments!



### Waiver

Veterans may apply for a waiver to request that individual charges or all debt be removed from their VA account. To apply for a waiver, you must turn in your reasons for the request along with a financial report. This needs to occur within 180 days from the date of the statement on which the charges first occurred.

If you are having trouble paying your VA bill, or if your eligibility has changed, contact the First Party Call Center at 1-866-582-6140 to discuss the options available to you. Information is also available online from the VA Debt Management Center at: [www.va.gov/debtman/index.htm](http://www.va.gov/debtman/index.htm).

## Providing Safe Care for Veterans is our Primary Concern



Please tell us your ideas for improving patient safety at your VA Medical Center. Send an email message to:

[V22PatientSafety@med.va.gov](mailto:V22PatientSafety@med.va.gov)

# Seamless Transition: A Service for Those Who Served

**W**hen service members return from active duty they have many choices to make—where to live, where to work, and a number of other decisions about their lives. Fortunately, Veterans Affairs (VA) provides a Seamless Transition Program to make at least one choice easy—how to continue health care without disruption.

“The Seamless Transition Program helps with the transition of service members being discharged from the Department of Defense (DoD) health care system to the VA,” said Lisa Tinch, Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)/Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) Program Coordinator. VA offers a variety of services, including medical screening and evaluation, surgery, pharmacy, readjustment counseling, and mental health care.

To become eligible for these services, a veteran must first complete the enrollment process. This is important for service members to do quickly upon return, and within two years. The VA strives to make the process as painless as possible. “There are many paths that you can take to enter into our system,” said Tinch. “We have an online option because many of the younger service members use the internet. It is easy to enroll online because you don’t have to physically go into a medical center.” However, for those who prefer to speak with a provider in person, walk-in clinics are the best choice. According to Tinch, “You can go to a VA medical center and begin the enrollment process—from screening to follow-up care. The process may be completed in one day.”

Over the last two years, VA has expanded the Seamless Transition Program, creating new positions for program coordinators, care managers, and transition assistants. “As the number of new veterans began to increase across the country, the VA realized that it needed to dedicate a team full-time,” said Tinch.

Many resources are available on the website, [www.desertpacific.va.gov/iraqiFreedBenef.htm](http://www.desertpacific.va.gov/iraqiFreedBenef.htm),

To enroll for health care benefits online, go to [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov), click “Health Care,” and then under “Health Care Benefits” click “Apply for Care.” From this page you can access the electronic application for health care benefits (10-10ez form).



where veterans can find the nearest VA facility, read tips for applying for benefits, and complete their application. Go online or visit a VA medical center today to find out what VA can do for you and your family.

## A Lifeline for Veterans: National Suicide Hotline

If you are in crisis, call:  
**1-800-273-TALK (8255)**  
Help is available 24 hours a day.

If you notice any of the following behaviors in yourself or a loved one, contact your VA Medical Center, community clinic, Vet Center or call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline immediately.

- ★ Violence towards self or others
- ★ Talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide
- ★ Rage, uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge
- ★ Acting in a reckless or risky way
- ★ Hopelessness
- ★ Lack of purpose

# VA Uses Home Telehealth to Connect Patients and Providers



*Laural Traylor, MSW, answers questions about Care Coordination Services and Home Telehealth (CCHT)*

## **Q: What is telehealth?**

**A:** In Veterans Affairs (VA), we continue to look for better ways to keep you healthy. Today, some new programs are using technology to do just that. Telehealth is a process that uses simple devices to share information between you and your VA health care providers. The equipment is not difficult to use and it works with your regular telephone service to transfer information on your health—all in the comfort of your own home.

## **Q: Why use telehealth?**

**A:** When your VA provider can see information about you on a regular basis, it is easier to identify potential problems before they become serious. Often, conditions that may affect your health are not discovered until you come in to a clinic or hospital for care. One of the nicest features of this program is that you can talk to a licensed health care provider from your own home. This individual is called a “care coordinator” and is your very own personal advisor. He or she will become familiar with you and your situation and will talk with you and/or your family or caregiver on a regular basis. This person works closely with your primary provider and all the other members of your health care team to ensure that your health needs are met quickly—and before they are urgent.

## **Q: What kind of equipment is used and what does it do?**

**A:** The equipment that is used to communicate with your care coordinator may include very simple text messaging units, video cameras or other telephone-based monitoring systems. There are many different kinds of programs, but common uses include monitoring your blood pressure and other vital signs, reminding you when to take your medication, educating you about your condition, or simply checking in to see how you are feeling.

## **Q: How does this help me?**

**A:** Telehealth lets your care coordinator evaluate you as needed, rather than having you wait until a scheduled visit or

urgent care need. In some cases, emergencies can be avoided. Care coordinators are in contact with you regularly and can determine if you have any special needs.

## **Q: What are other benefits of telehealth and care coordination?**

- A:**
- Care coordinators can identify problems before they become serious.
  - Your travel time and expenses may be greatly reduced.
  - Many veterans can continue to live at home.
  - You may experience increased satisfaction and feelings of safety.



**Ask your VA provider if you qualify for home telehealth!**

### **For More Information**

Visit the VA website for Care Coordination at  
**[www.va.gov/occ](http://www.va.gov/occ)**

# Commit to Quit!

**I**t's quittin' time! Veterans Affairs (VA) reports that the rate of smoking is much higher for veterans than the general population, and consequently, veterans suffer from a higher rate of smoking-related illnesses. Each year these illnesses (such as cancer, lung disease, and stroke) kill over 430,000 Americans, but after just one smoke-free year, the risk of *coronary* heart disease is cut in half.

Quitting is not easy, but there are many reasons to try. Not only will you improve your own health, but you will also improve the health of those with whom you live. Living smoke-free will lower your chance of cancer or a heart attack and improve your quality of life—as an added bonus, think of the money you'll save! Picture this, if one pack of cigarettes costs four dollars, and you buy one every day, you could save \$1,460 each year!

The first and most important step to quit smoking is to make a commitment and be confident in your decision. If you need motivation, write it down. Include all of the reasons

why you are quitting, and keep that list handy for when times get difficult.

The VA offers many services to assist veterans who are trying to quit smoking, such as counseling, nicotine replacement therapy, smoking cessation clinics, and a telephone counseling line. In addition, more information can be found online at [www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov).

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has created a countdown to help guide smokers once they've decided to quit. To follow this plan, you must first choose the date you would like to quit, and then follow the steps below.

According to René Haas, VA Patient Health Education Coordinator at Long Beach, "Only 15 percent of Californians smoke—why not join the majority?" If you're ready to quit, talk to your VA provider about what is best for you or call 1-800-QUIT-NOW, and if you don't succeed the first time, try again—your health is worth it!



# VA Combats Deadly Bacteria



**T**he signs are posted everywhere—businesses, restaurants, and doctor’s offices—all reminding you to “please wash your hands.” This simple task is not only important for daily germ defense, but it can also prevent deadly infections.

One of the fastest growing concerns among health care facilities is a germ that spreads through direct physical contact and can cause pneumonia or wound and bloodstream infections. Called Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus Aureus* (MRSA), this bacteria is an infection that is resistant to antibiotics, making it tough to treat. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that MRSA is responsible for more than 100,000 U.S. hospitalizations each year.

MRSA is also hard to detect, since it can be carried on the skin, or in the nose of a healthy person without any visible signs. A person will not become infected until MRSA enters an opening in the skin, but even without infection it can be easily passed on through contact with a person or object that has been contaminated by the bacteria.

The VA has committed to reducing MRSA in all VA medical centers. To accomplish this, VA has implemented

a new health and safety program to prevent MRSA. In order to keep you, and other patients healthy, VA will be:

1. Testing all patients for MRSA (testing involves placing a cotton swab into the nose; the cotton swab sample is then sent to the lab to look for MRSA germs).
2. Separating patients who have MRSA germs from those that do not.
3. Encouraging thorough hand-washing.
4. Educating employees.

While MRSA is a serious illness, there are many simple ways you can help prevent MRSA and other infections. First, wash your hands often. If you have a cut or wound, make sure to keep the area clean and covered, and visit a medical facility if you notice that it isn’t healing. Also, do not share personal items that could pass bacteria, like razors or towels. And finally, if a doctor prescribes an antibiotic for your wound, make sure to take the entire prescribed dose. If you do have any concerns, visit the nearest VA facility for an MRSA test to protect yourself and your loved ones from becoming seriously ill.

## VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network Vet Centers

### Anaheim Vet Center

859 South Harbor Boulevard  
Anaheim, CA 92805-5157  
714-776-0161

### Corona Vet Center

800 Magnolia Ave., Suite 110  
Corona, CA 92879-3123  
951-734-0525

### East Los Angeles Vet Center

5400 E. Olympic Boulevard  
Suite 150  
Commerce, CA 90022-5147  
323-728-9966

### Las Vegas Vet Center

1919 S. Jones Blvd., Suite A  
Las Vegas, NV 89146  
702-251-7873

### Los Angeles Vet Center

1045 W. Redondo Beach Boulevard  
Suite 150  
Gardena, CA 90247-4129  
310-767-1221

### San Bernardino Vet Center

155 W. Hospitality Lane, Suite 140  
San Bernardino, CA 92408-3305  
909-890-0797

### San Diego Vet Center

2900 Sixth Avenue  
San Diego, CA 92103-1003  
619-294-2040

### San Marcos Vet Center

1 Civic Center Drive, Suite 140  
San Marcos, CA 92069  
760-744-6914

### Sepulveda Vet Center

9737 Haskell Avenue  
Sepulveda, CA 91343-1618  
818-892-9227

### Ventura Vet Center

790 E. Santa Clara, Suite 100  
Ventura, CA 93001-2964  
805-585-1860

### West Los Angeles Vet Center

5730 Uplander Way, Suite 100  
Culver City, CA 90230-6615  
310-641-0326

## Announcing New Community Clinics

### South Orange County

We are excited to announce the opening of a new VA Community Clinic in South Orange County at 25292 McIntyre Street in Laguna Hills. The clinic is scheduled to open by mid-January.

### Santa Maria

We are pleased to announce the new VA Community Clinic that opened in Santa Maria at 1550 East Main Street. The clinic is open Monday through Friday, 8:00 am to 4:30 pm. Veterans can make an appointment by calling (805) 354-6000.

# REACHING US IS EASY

## ★ VA Medical Centers

**VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System**  
P.O. Box 360001  
Las Vegas, NV 89036  
702-636-3000

**Mike O'Callaghan Federal Hospital**  
4700 Las Vegas Boulevard North  
Las Vegas, NV 89191  
702-653-2215

**VA Loma Linda Healthcare System**  
11201 Benton Street  
Loma Linda, CA 92357  
909-825-7084

**VA Long Beach Healthcare System**  
5901 East 7th Street  
Long Beach, CA 90822  
562-826-8000

**VA San Diego Healthcare System**  
3350 La Jolla Village Drive  
San Diego, CA 92161  
858-552-8585

**VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System**  
11301 Wilshire Boulevard  
Los Angeles, CA 90073  
310-478-3711

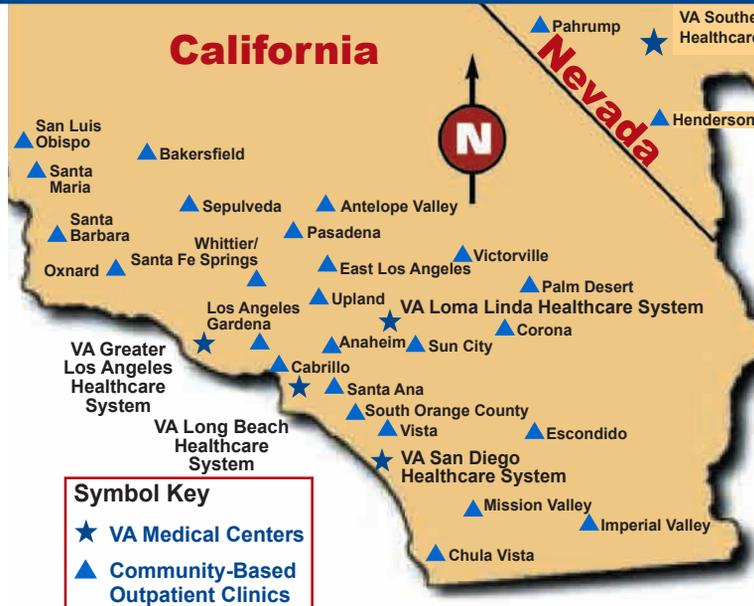
## ▲ Community Clinics

**Anaheim**  
1801 W. Romneya Drive  
3rd Floor, Suite 303  
Anaheim, CA 92801  
714-780-5400

**Antelope Valley**  
547 W. Lancaster Blvd.  
Lancaster, CA 93534  
661-729-8655

**Bakersfield**  
1801 Westwind Drive  
Bakersfield, CA 93301  
661-632-1800

**Cabrillo**  
2001 River Avenue  
Long Beach, CA 90810  
562-826-8414



**Chula Vista**  
835 3rd Avenue  
Chula Vista, CA 91910  
619-409-1600

**Corona**  
800 Magnolia Avenue #101  
Corona, CA 92879  
951-817-8820

**East Los Angeles**  
5400 E. Olympic Boulevard #150  
City of Commerce, CA 90040  
323-725-7557

**Escondido**  
815 East Pennsylvania Avenue  
Escondido, CA 92025  
760-466-7020

**Gardena**  
1251 Redondo Beach Boulevard  
3rd Floor  
Gardena, CA 90247  
310-851-4705

**Henderson**  
2920 Green Valley Parkway,  
Suite 215  
Henderson, NV 89014  
702-456-3825

**Imperial Valley**  
528 G Street  
Brawley, CA 92227  
760-344-9085

**Las Vegas - Homeless Veterans**  
912 West Owens Avenue  
Las Vegas, NV 89106  
702-636-4077

**Los Angeles**  
351 E. Temple Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012  
213-253-2677

**Mission Valley**  
8810 Rio San Diego Drive  
San Diego, CA 92108  
619-400-5000

**Oxnard**  
250 W. Citrus Grove Avenue  
Suite 140  
Oxnard, CA 93030  
805-983-6384

**Palm Desert**  
41865 Boardwalk, Suite 103  
Palm Desert, CA 92211  
760-341-5570

**Pahrump**  
2100 E. Calvada Boulevard  
Pahrump, NV 89048  
775-727-7535

**Pasadena**  
420 W. Las Tunas Drive  
San Gabriel, CA 91776  
626-289-5973

**San Luis Obispo**  
1288 Morro St., #200  
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401  
805-543-1233

**Santa Ana**  
Bristol Medical Center  
2740 S. Bristol Street  
1st Floor, Suite 110  
Santa Ana, CA 92704  
714-825-3500

**Santa Barbara**  
4440 Calle Real  
Santa Barbara, CA 93110  
805-683-1491

**Santa Maria**  
1550 East Main Street  
Santa Maria, CA 93454  
805-354-6000

**Sepulveda**  
16111 Plummer Street  
Sepulveda, CA 91343  
818-891-7711

**South Orange County**  
25292 McIntyre Street  
Laguna Hills, CA 92653  
(opening in late January 2008)

**Sun City**  
28125 Bradley Road  
Suite 130  
Sun City, CA 92586  
951-672-1931

**Upland**  
1238 E. Arrow Highway,  
No. 100  
Upland, CA 91786  
909-946-5348

**Victorville**  
12138 Industrial Boulevard  
Suite 120  
Victorville, CA 92392  
760-951-2599

**Vista**  
1840 West Drive  
Vista, CA 92083  
760-643-2000

**Whittier/Santa Fe Springs**  
10210 Orr and Day Road  
Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670  
562-864-5565

**Veterans' Health Today**  
5901 E. 7th St.  
Long Beach, CA 90822

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Additional copies can be found at [www.desertpacific.va.gov/publicaffairs.htm](http://www.desertpacific.va.gov/publicaffairs.htm)  
Address changes should be sent to your local VA medical center.

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