

Veterans' Health Today

SUMMER 2008

Sidestepping Shingles

A Woman's Wellbeing

Turn A Restless Night Into A Restful Night

**VA DESERT PACIFIC
HEALTHCARE NETWORK**



 **Department of
Veterans Affairs**

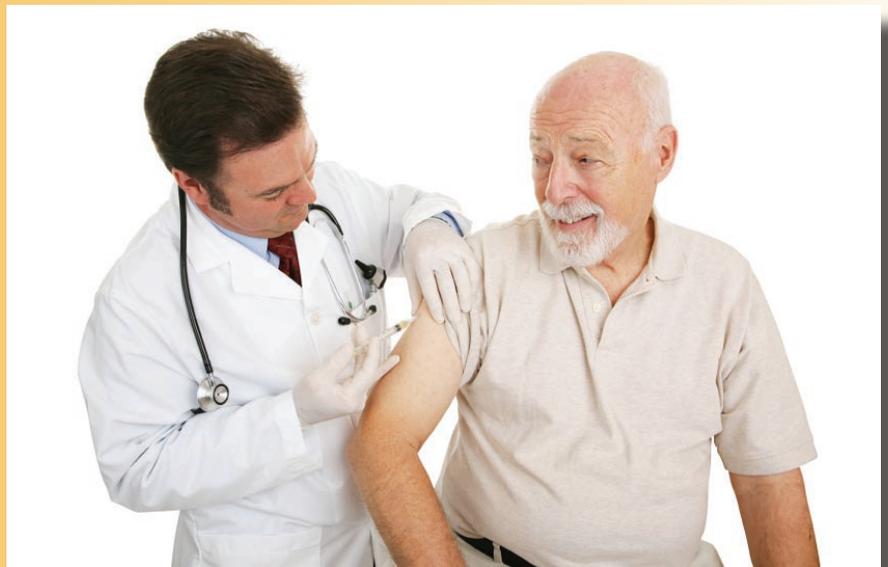
Sidestepping Shingles

Did you know that out of every 100 people, 10 to 20 are at risk of getting shingles?

Fortunately, a VA research partnership with the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases resulted in a new shingles vaccine. Currently available to veterans, this exciting new vaccine proved to prevent shingles from occurring in 51 percent of the men and women who participated in the study.

The Shingles Prevention Study examined men and women 60-years-old or older who were given either the vaccine or a placebo (a substance not containing any medicine). After three years of follow-up, only 315 people who received the vaccine developed shingles, compared to 642 people who developed shingles that were given the placebo. In addition, of those given the vaccine that did get shingles, their pain was reduced by 61 percent.

The shingles vaccine is recommended for veterans 60-years-old or older with a healthy immune system, who have not already had shingles. The vaccine is not recommended for those who have not had chickenpox or have a hard time fighting infections. If you are interested in receiving the vaccine, or want to find out if it is right for you, contact your VA provider for more information.



*Definition of shingles:
Shingles is a painful disease marked by a blistering rash. It is caused by the same virus that causes chickenpox.
.....*

Who is at the greatest risk of getting shingles? Those who:

- ▶ Have had chickenpox
- ▶ Are over 60-years-old
- ▶ Have a disease or health condition that weakens their immune system

A Woman's Wellbeing

Women have different needs than men

The number of women serving in the Armed Forces is growing, representing 20 percent of new recruits, 15 percent of active duty forces, and 17 percent of reserve and National Guard forces. When it comes to health care, every veteran has individual concerns, and women veterans in particular have different needs from male veterans.

To help address these different needs, VA now has women's clinics at most of its hospitals and community clinics. There are also female primary care physicians and gynecology clinics; many VA medical centers even have private waiting rooms for women. On-site care and services for common female health matters are offered at over 90 percent of VA sites. Plus, the VA will arrange outside care for any services they cannot directly provide.

For women to maintain a healthy wellbeing, diet, exercise, and regular check-ups are important. However, there are some illnesses that women are at a higher-risk of developing. Depression, obesity, heart disease, and osteoporosis are more common in women than men. The best prevention is awareness. Preventative care and regular screenings will help keep you healthy, and become more important as you age. Screenings for blood pressure, thyroid, cholesterol, bone density, and blood glucose should be discussed with your VA provider, especially if you are over 45 years of age.

If you are a female veteran, visit or call your nearest VA medical center to find out what services are available to meet your personal needs now and for the years that lie ahead.



Osteoporosis, a general concern for aging women, is a condition of weakened bones that usually occurs in the hip, wrist, and/or spine. You can help prevent osteoporosis by taking a calcium supplement, or by increasing your calcium and vitamin D intake with foods such as:

- ▶ Low fat or fat free yogurt
- ▶ Cheese
- ▶ Low fat milk
- ▶ Orange juice with added calcium
- ▶ Broccoli
- ▶ Salmon
- ▶ Eggs (vitamin D is in the yolk)

Ask your VA provider about other things you can do to ensure that you are getting the right amount of calcium.

What You Can Do to Prevent Suicide

Suicide has developed into a growing national concern, and the VA has put measures in place to help address this health issue. A study prepared by the VA Mental Illness Research, Education, & Clinical Center (MIRECC) showed that suicide is the fourth leading cause of death for U.S. adults between the ages of 18 and 65.

According to Damisi Graham, Suicide Prevention Coordinator at the VA Long Beach Healthcare System, “We want veterans to know that we care, and we try to encourage them to seek treatment immediately if they are suffering from depression or suicidal thoughts.” Like Graham, suicide prevention coordinators are available at each VA medical center to help high-risk patients, making sure they’re getting the care they need.

But how can you know when a friend or loved one needs help? If you think that something may be wrong, Graham advises listening to them and helping them get immediate attention. Most suicide attempts relate to overwhelming feelings of loneliness, worthlessness, hopelessness, helplessness, or guilt. Examples of factors that can increase the risk of suicidal thoughts are:

- ❖ Pain or serious physical illness
- ❖ Alcohol or drug abuse
- ❖ Unemployment and/or problems with money
- ❖ Death of a loved one
- ❖ Ongoing relationship problems

**24-HOUR
NATIONAL SUICIDE
PREVENTION HOTLINE
1-800-273-TALK
It’s free and
confidential!**

Flags that can alert you to someone’s need for help include:

- ❖ Talking about death, dying, or suicide
- ❖ Giving away personal belongings and writing a will
- ❖ Withdrawal from family and friends
- ❖ Anxiety, agitation, sleeplessness, or mood swings
- ❖ Self-destructive behavior, such as using alcohol or drugs
- ❖ Seeking access to weapons or pills

Regardless of the signs, trust your instincts. If you think that a loved one or friend is in danger, talk to them, ask them to call a professional, or offer to take them to see a professional. Let them know of your concern and be open to what they have to say. Give them hope that they can feel better again.

VA has also established a 24-hour national hotline. For free and confidential help, veterans can call the hotline (1-800-273-TALK) and be immediately connected to mental health professionals. Veterans can also contact their local VA medical center for other treatment options. For more information, visit www.mentalhealth.va.gov.

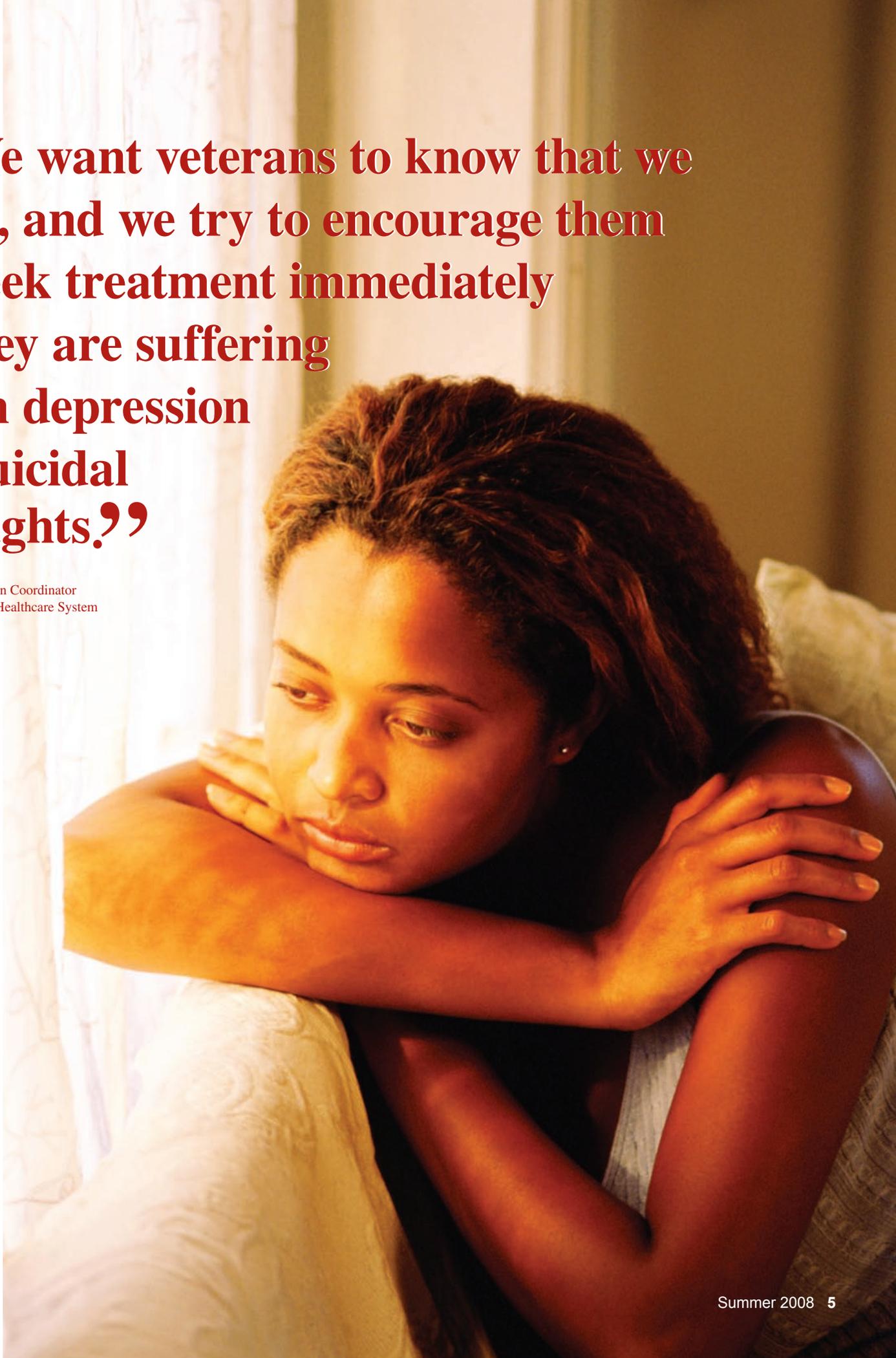
Since beginning the 24-hour national suicide hotline in July 2007 through April 2008:

- ☑ 16,414 calls have come from veterans;
- ☑ 2,125 calls have come from family members or friends; and
- ☑ 493 active duty service members have called

These calls have led to 3,464 referrals to suicide prevention coordinators and 885 rescues.

“We want veterans to know that we care, and we try to encourage them to seek treatment immediately if they are suffering from depression or suicidal thoughts.”

Damisi Graham
Suicide Prevention Coordinator
VA Long Beach Healthcare System



Turn a Restless Night...

When you lay down at night, do you fall asleep quickly, or do you spend most of the night counting sheep?

Dr. Ramiz Fargo, a physician at the VA Loma Linda Healthcare System in California, recognizes that many veterans have trouble getting the recommended 8 hours of sleep. “We sometimes have a bad night or a few bad nights; that’s common and nothing to worry about,” says Fargo. “It becomes a problem when you notice difficulty functioning during the day.”

According to Fargo, sleeplessness is often caused by stress, depression, pain, or a big event. In any case, many of your body’s functions are impacted when you don’t get enough rest. “When we are sleep deprived, it is harder to commit things to memory,” says Fargo. A lack of sleep can also affect decision-making, responsiveness, mood, blood pressure, and metabolism.

There are over 100 identified sleep disorders. Most problems include:

- ✓ Falling and staying asleep (insomnia)
- ✓ Breathing problems during sleep (sleep apnea)
- ✓ Leg movements before and during sleep (restless legs syndrome)

If you are experiencing any problems, Fargo advises writing down your symptoms and all medications you’re taking. “Some veterans are on medications that can contribute to insomnia, such as diuretics, blood pressure medications, or anti-depressants,” he says. For doctors to properly diagnose sleep disorders, it helps to know your full medical history.

And lastly, Dr. Fargo tells patients, “Don’t take your problems to bed with you; get out of bed, go to another room, and do something not too stimulating like reading or listen-

To help achieve a better sleep, Dr. Fargo recommends that you:

- ✓ Maintain a regular sleep schedule 7 days a week
- ✓ Avoid napping
- ✓ Get regular exercise at least 3 hours before bedtime
- ✓ Walk in the morning or early afternoon
- ✓ Take your medications at least 2 hours before bedtime
- ✓ Create a relaxed sleep environment (comfortable bed)

Before bedtime, you should also avoid:

- ✓ Drinking a lot of liquids (to reduce acid reflux)
- ✓ Eating heavy meals
- ✓ Drinking caffeine
- ✓ Smoking
- ✓ Drinking Alcohol

ing to the radio in low light; then go back to bed when you get sleepy again.” He adds that if you still can’t fall asleep after half an hour, you should get up and repeat the process. If your problems continue, your doctor may recommend medication or a sleep study to observe what’s happening to your body during sleep.

Remember, you don’t have to figure out your sleep disturbances on your own—your local VA medical center is ready to help.



...Into a Restful Night!

We've got a New Look!

VA has improved its website and you may have noticed some of the changes happening. All VA medical centers now have websites that feature important information such as their address, telephone numbers, driving directions, and hours of operation. You can also find information about:

- ⇒ Services that are provided
- ⇒ Locations of community clinics
- ⇒ Eligibility and benefits
- ⇒ How to make, change, or cancel an appointment
- ⇒ Prescription refills

VA will continue enhancing the uses of its website and the included features, but we'd also like to understand your needs and current uses of the internet. Please fill out the attached survey so we can hear your ideas. Your answers and comments will help provide direction for future website updates.



VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network Vet Centers

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

Orange County Vet Center

12453 Lewis Street, Suite 101
Garden Grove, CA
714-776-0161

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

My HealtheVet VA's Web Health Portal

My HealtheVet is celebrating its **fifth anniversary** this year, and will continue to expand its services to veterans. These services will include a number of features that will enhance patient-provider relationships.

My HealtheVet provides access to personal, secure, and convenient health information to help you improve your health status. In addition, the website provides tools that allow you to become an active partner in your health care; you can refill your prescriptions, find health information, keep a journal, use self-assessment tools, and receive seasonal health reminders (for example, when to get your flu shot).

In the near future, My HealtheVet will provide secure messaging which will allow registered users to communicate directly with their primary health care provider teams. To participate, VA encourages you, your caregivers, and your care providers to register by completing an in-person authentication (IPA) process at your local VA medical center or community clinic.

Additional features will also include appointment management, lab results, and wellness reminders. Contact your local VA now to receive more information on how to get access to health information anytime, anywhere—or visit the website online at www.myhealth.va.gov.

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



Symbol Key
★ VA Medical Centers
▲ Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

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
1600 South Imperial Drive
El Centro, CA 92243
760-352-1506

Laguna Hills
25292 McIntyre Street
Laguna Hills, CA 92653
949-269-0700

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

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

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Long Beach, CA 90822

This publication is provided as a service to enrolled veterans in So. California and So. Nevada.
Additional copies can be found at www.desertpacific.va.gov/publicaffairs.htm
Address changes should be sent to your local VA medical center.

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