



## CORONAVIRUS FAQs FOR CONNECTICUT VETERANS

### FOR STAFFERS ANSWERING QUESTIONS

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Disclaimer: These FAQs were prepared with information current as of April 19, 2020 and do not purport to provide legal advice or to give an opinion as to the appropriate course of action in a particular case. Veterans’ advocates should always conduct their own research on the best course of action for their particular case and should always check any information contained in these FAQs against the relevant statute or regulation to ensure its accuracy.

## HEALTHCARE ACCESS

### Access to Veterans Clinics and Healthcare Facilities

- **Are Connecticut VA clinics still open?**
  - All Connecticut outpatient VA clinics (Danbury, New London, Stamford, Waterbury, Willimantic and Winsted) are currently **closed to in-person** visits due to coronavirus.
  - Patients who have not been contacted by clinic staff prior to their scheduled appointment should call the clinic directly for instructions or the Call Center at 888-808-7921.
  - Veterans should always call in advance before visiting a clinic.
- **For patients seeking medical care:**
  - Veterans should call **866-808-7921** before visiting the clinic—even if the veteran already has an appointment. Or the veteran can sign in to [My HealtheVet](#) and send a secure message. The veteran may be able to get diagnosed and receive care through [VA telehealth](#) without having to come in at all.
- **What should the veteran expect if he or she is instructed to visit a healthcare facility?**
  - It is important to call in advance before visiting a VA hospital, clinic, community living center or any other health care facility.
  - Due to coronavirus, facilities are now conducting health screening tests for those who need to visit.
  - If the veteran does intend to visit a VA hospital, clinic, community living center or other health care facility, the veteran will be met at the entrance by a staff member. They will greet the veteran and ask him or her some screening questions. Depending on the veteran's answers, a VA health care professional will assist him or her on the next steps of the visit.

### Alternatives to In-Person Visits

- **What are the alternatives to visiting a healthcare facility in person?**
  - Instead of visiting a healthcare facility, the veteran can speak with his or her primary care provider to determine if telehealth (healthcare by phone) and/or VA Video Connect (healthcare application on the veteran's computer or mobile device) would work for them.
  - Many healthcare services are now shifting to telehealth for the duration of the coronavirus outbreak. These services include (but are not limited to): primary care, neurology, dermatology, and mental health services. Urgent care remains open for in-person visits for emergencies.

#### (1) Telehealth

- VA Telehealth enables veterans to talk with VA providers over the phone.
- To inquire about telehealth options for scheduled or future appointments the veteran can call 203-937-4767 or 860-667-6838.

■ **How does a veteran schedule a telehealth appointment?**

- **By Phone:** This is the fastest way to secure a telehealth appointment. Call the local VA health facility to schedule or change an appointment time. The veteran can also call 203-937-4767 or 860-667-6838, and an operator will be available to transfer the individual.
- **Online:** A veteran can request an appointment online and a scheduler will get back to the individual. Due to coronavirus, a veteran will not be able to directly schedule an appointment for him or herself online.
  - Note: in order to be able to schedule an appointment online, a veteran must be (1) enrolled in VA health care, and (2) have scheduled an appointment with a VA health facility that uses online schedule and (3) be registered with that facility and/or had an appointment there before.

(2) VA VIDEO CONNECT

- VA Video Connect is a mobile application that allows the veteran to be seen by a medical provider via his or her mobile phone or computer.
- In order to use VA Video Connect, a veteran must: (1) be enrolled in VA health care, (2) have access to a working email account, (3) if using an iOS device, install the iOS VA Video Connect App from iTunes.

Addressing Symptoms of Coronavirus

- **What are the symptoms of coronavirus?**
  - [According to the CDC](#), the symptoms of coronavirus include fever, cough, and shortness of breath.
- **What should a veteran do if experiencing symptoms of coronavirus?**
  - If a veteran has symptoms of coronavirus (including fever, coughing, and shortness of breath), he or she should call the VA medical center or message a doctor through MyHealthVet prior to going to the medical center.
  - The staff at the center and/or the doctor may recommend a telehealth consult prior to an in-person visit, saving time and protecting the veteran from the virus.
  - To find out if and when local centers are open, veterans can visit <https://www.va.gov/find-locations>, which includes up to date information about hours and the availability of mobile clinics.
  - If the veteran is experiencing emergency warning signs of coronavirus, it is important to seek medical attention immediately. [According to the CDC](#), these signs include trouble breathing, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new confusion or inability to arouse, bluish lips or face. This list is not all inclusive, and the individual should consult a medical provider for any other symptoms that are severe or concerning.

## Telephone Numbers for Veterans Healthcare in Connecticut

<b>24 Hour<sup>1</sup> Nurse &amp; Telephone Care</b>	West Haven Campus: 203-937-4767 Newington Campus: 860-667-6838
<b>Change Appointment</b>	West Haven Campus: 203-937-4767 or 203-937-3874 Newington Campus: 860-666-6951
<b>Veterans Crisis Line</b>	1-800-273-8255 (Press 1)
<b>National Veterans Helpline</b>	1-800-507-4571
<b>Patient Locator</b>	203-932-5711 x7246 or x7248
<b>Pharmacy Refill</b>	1-888-440-6580
<b>Staff Locator</b>	203-932-5711 x4211

## VA BENEFITS

### Veterans Benefits Claims

- **Is the VA still processing veterans benefits claims?**
  - Yes, the VA is still processing veterans benefits claims. However, there are some disruptions due to coronavirus, and some processes like in-person claim exams have been postponed. As a result, there may be delays in processing.
- **What if the veteran has a claim exam scheduled?**
  - The VA is still conducting claim exams (also called compensation and pension, or C&P, exams) to rate potential disabilities, diagnose health conditions, and determine service-connected disabilities.
  - The VA is now doing many exams virtually by phone, videoconference, or online. The VA is completing more records reviews using Acceptable Clinical Evidence (ACE). This means the VA will review a veteran's existing medical records instead of requiring an in-person or telehealth exam.
- **What if the veteran's claim requires an in-person exam?**
  - The VA is not conducting in-person exams right now and will contact the veteran to reschedule the exam for a later date.
  - The veteran can update his or her contact information here: <https://www.va.gov/change-address>
  - If the veteran has questions or would like to proactively reschedule his or her exam, the veteran can contact his or her VA medical center or health facility, or send a secure message to his or her health care provider through MyHealtheVet.
- **What if the veteran has an in-person exam scheduled with a non-VA provider that the VA has contracted with to conduct his or her exam?**
  - If the veteran has an exam appointment with a contracted provider, the provider may still conduct the exam while taking added steps to ensure the veteran's

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<sup>1</sup> There can be a wait time on these lines.

safety and the safety of the clinical staff. If the veteran feels unsafe going to an in-person exam at this time, the VA can put his or her exam on hold until it can be rescheduled. The VA says it will not deny a claim solely for failure to report for an exam at this time. If the veteran has questions or need to request a hold on his or her exam, he or she should contact the non-VA provider directly.

## Filing Deadlines for Veterans Benefits Claims and Appeals

- **Have filing deadlines for veterans benefits claims and appeals changed?**
  - As of April 3, 2020, the VA is providing extensions for any claim or paperwork deadlines. The veteran can submit his or her paperwork late to:
    - Perfect a claim
    - Challenge an adverse decision
    - Submit a Notice of Disagreement
    - Submit a Substantive Appeal
    - Respond to a Supplemental Statement of the Case
  - If the veteran needs a claim extension, he or she can submit the extension request with any late-filed paperwork. The veteran doesn't have to proactively request an extension in advance. The VA will also accept typed or digital signatures instead of wet signatures (meaning signed in ink) on forms. If the veteran has any questions, he or she can call the VA at 800-827-1000 from Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. ET.

## Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA) Hearings

- **Is the Board of Veterans' Appeals still holding hearings?**
  - The Board has temporarily suspended all in-person hearings, including travel board and Central Office hearings. However, virtual hearings remain available.
- **How can a veteran change his or her hearing to a virtual hearing or postpone the hearing?**
  - If a veteran already has a hearing scheduled and wants to change to a virtual hearing or postpone the hearing, the veteran can reach out to his or her Hartford Regional Office hearing coordinator, Maria Jackson, at [Maria.Jackson@va.gov](mailto:Maria.Jackson@va.gov). The veteran can also call the general VA Appeals information line at 1-800-827-1000.
- **What does the veteran need in order to participate in a virtual hearing?**
  - In order to participate in a virtual hearing, an individual will need a personal computer or a mobile device with the following capabilities:
    - All devices must have a camera and microphone for video/audio capabilities.
    - Apple devices require the VA Video Connect application.
    - Android devices require no application as the session will launch automatically in a web browser after the session link is selected from the email invitation.

Prepared with assistance from the Yale Law School Veterans Legal Services Clinic. This document reflects known information as of April 19, 2020 and is subject to change.

- It is recommended virtual hearing users use a personal computer or laptop with a secure WIFI or ethernet connection in a private setting (e.g. office, within a home). Users may use an Android or Apple Mobile Devices in a private setting, with a secure and reliable WIFI connection or cellular service.
- The preferred browser, and the one that works best, for both personal computers, laptops and Android devices, is Google Chrome. If access to Google Chrome is not available, Internet Explorer is a comparable alternative browser.

#### Expediting an Appeal if the Veteran Has Been Diagnosed with Coronavirus

- **Can a veteran expedite the appeal of a benefits claim if they have been diagnosed with coronavirus?**
  - Yes. If the veteran have been diagnosed with coronavirus, the Board will expedite the appeal (otherwise known as “Advance on Docket”). To submit a motion to expedite an appeal, the veteran can mail or fax a written request to advance the claim on the docket along with documentation of his or her coronavirus diagnosis to the addresses below:
    - By Fax: 844-678-8979 (toll free)
    - By Mail: Board of Veterans’ Appeals  
P.O. Box 27063  
Washington, DC 20038

#### Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (CAVC) Proceedings

- **Is the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims still holding oral arguments?**
  - Oral arguments previously scheduled through April 20, 2020, have been cancelled, subject to rescheduling in the future as the business of the Court permits.
  - For scheduled arguments beginning on April 21, 2020, the Court is making plans to hear arguments via teleconference. Counsel and Judges will dial into a previously arranged conference, and a recording of the argument will be posted to our website. Further details will be shared with the parties and posted to the Court’s website.
- **Have filing deadlines changed for the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims?**
  - With the exception of the special provisions being made for teleconferenced oral arguments, the Court is continuing normal operations, and filing deadlines will not be automatically extended under Rule 26(a). However, the Court appreciates that the coronavirus pandemic may create challenges for parties in meeting some deadlines and, while moving cases forward remains a priority, will sympathetically consider requests for extensions or stays in individual cases.
  - Questions should be directed to the Clerk of the Court ([gblock@uscourts.cavc.gov](mailto:gblock@uscourts.cavc.gov)).

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- Source: [http://www.uscourts.cavc.gov/special.php?ann\\_id=131](http://www.uscourts.cavc.gov/special.php?ann_id=131)

## GI Benefits

- **Can student veterans still receive GI Bill benefits even though classes have now moved online?**
  - Student veterans will continue to receive their GI Bill benefits under a new law (S. 3503) passed by Congress and signed into law March 21.
  - The VA will continue providing the same level of education benefits to GI Bill students who now have to take courses online due to the coronavirus (coronavirus) outbreak.
  - GI Bill students will continue receiving the same monthly housing allowance (MHA) payments they received for resident training until Dec. 21, or until the school resumes in-person classes.
  - Source: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/72852/veterans-gi-bill-benefits-continue-covid-19-pandemic/>

## RECORDS CORRECTIONS AND DISCHARGE UPGRADES

### DoD Boards for Records Correction/Discharge Upgrades

- All federal records centers are closed for routine action. This closure may affect the timeliness of new applications received. All current requests continue to process to the maximum extent possible during the crisis.
- If a records correction or discharge upgrade application is affected by this process, the application will be closed until further notice. Once federal records centers' operations resume, the application will be reopened automatically and the veteran will be contacted.

## MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

- **What mental health resources are still available to veterans during this time?**

### Veterans Centers

- All Connecticut-based Veterans Centers are still open, but are urging veterans to call before taking any other action.
  - In an emergency, New Haven and Danbury centers will still see veterans in person, but ask that anyone who may be in an emergency situation call prior to coming in. The pre-screening call will determine when the veteran can be seen.
  - In an emergency, the Hartford and Norwich Vets Centers are recommending that veterans go to their nearest VA health center.
- All Connecticut-based Veterans Centers are offering their counseling options over the phone and internet for individuals who meet their eligibility criteria (i.e. combat veterans or individuals with experience of military sexual trauma)

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- Intake is being conducted over the phone.
- One-on-one counseling takes place either over the phone or on the VA's Video Connect platform or other VA approved platforms (such as Zoom) at the convenience of the veteran.
- Group counseling continues via conference calls for the convenience of veterans without access to the internet.
- Other Than Honorable (OTH) veterans are still able to access these resources, provided they meet the combat veteran or MST eligibility criteria.
- DAV transportation is no longer available to these facilities.
- **Location and Call-In Information**
  - Danbury Vet Center, located at The Atrium Building, 457 North Main Street, 1st floor
    - Phone: (203) 790-4000 or (877) 927-8387
  - Norwich Vet Center, located at 2 Cliff Street
    - Phone: (860) 887-1755
  - New Haven Vet Center located at 291 South Lambert Road (in Orange)
    - Phone: (203) 795-00148
  - Hartford Vet Center located at 25 Elm Street, Suite A (in Rocky Hill)
    - Phone: (860) 563-8800

#### Online and Call-in Resources

- **War Vet Call Center**
  - The War Vet Call Center is a confidential call center where combat veterans and their families can call to talk about their military experience or any other issue they are facing in their readjustment to civilian life.
  - Call 1-877-WAR-VETS (1-877-927-8387), 24/7.
- **Women Veterans Call Center**
  - The Women Veterans Call Center (WVCC) provides VA services and resources to women Veterans, their families, and caregivers. The veteran can also chat online anonymously with a WVCC representative.
  - Call 1-855-VA-Women (1-855-829-6636) 8 a.m.–10 p.m. ET, Monday–Friday; 8 a.m.–6:30 p.m. ET, Saturday.
  - Chat 8 a.m.–10 p.m. ET Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–6:30 p.m. ET, Saturday.
    - <http://www.womenshealth.va.gov/>
- **Real Warriors**
  - Real Warriors, a program through the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury (DCoE), provides information and resources about psychological health, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and traumatic brain injury.
  - Call 1-866-966-1020, available 24/7.
  - Chat online 24/7. <https://www.realwarriors.net/livechat>

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- Source: <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/MENTALHEALTH/get-help/index.asp>

## Acute Care

- If the veteran has thoughts of suicide or harming themselves or others, or otherwise needs to speak with someone urgently due to mental health concerns, the veteran can:
  - **Call the Veterans Crisis Line:** 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1
    - The veteran can also chat online at their website:  
<https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>
  - **Call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline:** 1-800-273-8255
  - Text with someone at [crisistextline.org](https://crisistextline.org) (text HOME to 741741)