Rensselaer County Veterans Newsletter

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Van Transportation...

* *Don't drive* and need to get to the Stratton VA Medical Center?

* We offer complimentary van transportation to and from the VAMC for *most morning* medical appointments.

For more information please call (518) 270-2760.

VETERANS CRISIS LINE

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PRESS 1

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Confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, for veterans and their loved ones

COVID-19 vaccines at VAMC

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has authorized the first 2 COVID-19 vaccines. We currently have a limited amount of these vaccines. We've worked with the CDC and other federal partners to develop a phased plan. Our goal is to do the most good for the most people during this time. This information is current as of January 28, 2021.

Under this plan, these groups are now being vaccinated at some VA health care facilities:

●VA health care personnel. Vaccinating our VA health care personnel helps us continue to provide care for Veterans.
●Veterans living in our long-term care facilities.
●Veterans who receive care at VA and are at high risk from COVID-19 based on VA and CDC risk criteria (https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/phased-implementation.html). At many VA health care facilities, this group includes all Veterans who are at least 75 years old. Each facility will determine when Veterans in this group can receive a vaccine. They'll base this decision on vaccine availability, local needs, as well as the strict storage and handling requirements of the vaccines.

Some designated family caregivers may qualify for vaccines:

Family caregivers who are enrolled in our Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) are eligible for vaccination when the Veteran they care for becomes eligible. If the Veteran you care for meets the criteria above, both you and the Veteran may be able to get vaccinated now. Vaccinating caregivers helps us support and protect Veterans.

Please wait for us to contact you about getting a COVID-19 vaccine. When you can get a vaccine at your local VA health facility, we'll contact you. You don't need to call us to reserve a vaccine or come to a VA facility to request or receive a vaccine until we contact you. Our staff will only provide vaccines to Veterans and designated caregivers who are currently eligible for one based on VA and CDC risk criteria.

Be aware that some VA health care facilities are hosting large vaccination events or asking Veterans to call the facility directly to schedule a vaccination. If you receive communications from your local VA health care facility about getting vaccinated at a large-scale event or contacting the facility to make an appointment, we encourage you to do so if you are in one of the risk groups currently being vaccinated at VA.

If you have questions, here's how to get the information you need:

●For ongoing updates on our COVID-19 vaccine plan, sign up for email updates (https://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/stay-informed).

●For more details on your local VA health facility's current plan, find your facility's website (https://www.va.gov/find-locations). On the facility website menu, go to Health care services, then COVID-19.

●For answers to general questions about getting a vaccine at VA, read our FAQs below. If you don't find your answer there, call our MyVA411 main information line at 800-698-2411 (TTY: 711).

●For more information about how your personal risk for COVID-19 will determine when you can get a vaccine, send a secure message to your VA health care provider (https://www.va.gov/health-care/secure-messaging/). If you don't receive care at VA, contact your primary health care provider.

How we created out phased COVID-19 vaccine plan

We based our phased COVID-19 vaccine plan on these criteria from CDC guidelines:

● **Risk of becoming infected with the virus**

● **Risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19**

● **Risk of spreading the virus to others**

● **Risk of harm to society if essential workers, including health care personnel, are unable to work**

We are following CDC guidelines for determining who is at high risk of severe illness or death from COVID-19. Factors that may influence the risk of severe illness include the following:

● **Age. The risk of severe illness or death from COVID-19 increases with age.**

● **Existing health problems. People with certain health problems (like diabetes, heart disease, or obesity) have a higher risk of severe illness or death from COVID-19.**

● **Other factors that raise a person's risk of severe illness or death from COVID-19, such as living in a nursing home or other group living facility.**

To learn more about people at increased risk, go to the CDC website (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/index.html).

Basic information about getting your vaccine at VA
As the supply of vaccine increases, we'll work with our care teams to let you know your options. It's your choice if you want to get a vaccine or not. Your decision won't affect your VA health care or any of your VA benefits in any way.

Where we'll offer vaccines
The first 2 authorized COVID-19 vaccines require special storage and handling. Because of this, we have a limited supply of vaccines. Our VA facilities will provide vaccines to Veterans receiving VA health care who are most at risk. When more vaccines are available, we'll determine when we can provide vaccines through our community provider network.

Eligibility
When more vaccines become available, we plan to offer a free COVID-19 vaccine to all Veterans receiving VA health care who want one. Your team will contact you when a vaccine is available to you. If you decide to get the vaccine, your team will help you schedule your appointments. If you're not currently receiving health care through VA, find out if you're eligible and how to apply (www.va.gov/health-care/how-to-apply/).

Safety
The U.S. vaccine safety system ensures that all vaccines are as safe as possible. Safety is a top priority as federal partners work to make COVID-19 vaccines available. Before the FDA authorizes a vaccine for use, they carefully review the available safety data and clinical trial results for that vaccine. To learn more about the safety of the 2 authorized COVID-19 vaccines, read the FDA fact sheets:

FDA Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine fact sheet (PDF) (https://www.fda.gov/media/144414/download)
FDA Moderna COVID-19 vaccine fact sheet (PDF) (https://www.fda.gov/media/144638/download)

We'll closely monitor everyone who gets a COVID-19 vaccine for reactions, side effects, or adverse events. An adverse event is an injury or harm that happens to someone after they receive a vaccine, which may or may not have been caused by the vaccine. We'll report this information in our vaccine monitoring and tracking system. This is the same system we use to monitor reactions to all vaccines, including those for the flu and shingles.

To learn more about COVID-19 vaccine safety, go to the CDC website (www.cdc.gov).

Privacy
We'll share the same information with the CDC that we share for other vaccines. This includes the following information:

● **Demographic information (like age, gender, race, and ethnicity) that helps the CDC understand which groups of people are receiving the vaccine**

● **Adverse reactions to the vaccine**

We won't share names or street addresses.

Questions you may have about COVID-19 vaccines

Vaccine research and FDA authorization

- **Is there a cure or any FDA-approved treatments for COVID-19?**

  There is no cure for COVID-19 at this time. There are treatments for COVID-19, but the risk of severe illness and death are still high in certain groups of people.

- **Is there an FDA-authorized COVID-19 vaccine?**

  Yes. The FDA has authorized 2 COVID-19 vaccines for public use. The Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is authorized for people who are at least 16 years old. The Moderna COVID-19 vaccine is authorized for people who are at least 18 years old.

  To learn more, read the FDA fact sheets for these 2 vaccines:

  Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine fact sheet (https://www.fda.gov/media/144414/download)
  Moderna COVID-19 vaccine fact sheet (https://www.fda.gov/media/144638/download)

  Federal, private, and academic partners continue to work to provide safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines as quickly as possible. The partnership for these efforts is called Operation Warp Speed (https://www.defense.gov/Explore/Spotlight/Coronavirus/ Operation-Warp-Speed). The partnership's goal is to deliver hundreds of millions of doses of safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines to people across the country. To learn more about Operation Warp Speed, read the Department of Health and Human Services fact sheet (https://www.hhs.gov/coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines/index.html).

- **What is the FDA's role in approving a safe and effective vaccine for COVID-19?**

  The FDA is the government agency that regulates all vaccines used in the U.S. It ensures organizations that develop vaccines follow strict scientific and regulatory processes. The FDA also reviews all of the laboratory and clinical trial data for each vaccine to make sure the vaccine is safe and effective before it can be used by the American public. This review process usually takes several years.

  During a public health emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic, the FDA can issue an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). An EUA speeds up the FDA's review process to get critical medical products such as vaccines to people as quickly as possible. The process still includes all the same important steps, but in a shorter period of time.

  After the FDA authorizes the product, they continue to monitor the product's safety and effectiveness. This includes tracking any adverse reactions or side effects that people may report when using the product.
  To learn more about how the FDA and other government partners are speeding up the process to get COVID-19 vaccines to the public, go to the Operation Warp Speed Accelerated COVID-19 Vaccine Process infographic (https://media.defense.gov/2020/ Aug/13/2002476369/-1/-1/0/200813-D-ZZ999-100.JPG).

  To learn more about the EUA process in general, play this FDA video (YouTube) (https://www.youtube.com/watch? v=iGkwaESsGBQ&feature=youtu.be).

- **Is VA participating in COVID-19 research studies?**

  Yes. As one of the nation's leaders in health research, we continue to participate in research studies for new COVID-19 vaccines and treatments. These studies are also called clinical trials.

  We need research studies to help find more safe and effective ways to prevent and treat COVID-19. Because COVID-19 is so new, we still have a lot to learn.

  If you'd like, you can help in these efforts by signing up for our research volunteer list. If we think you may be eligible to be a participant in one of our research studies, we'll contact you to tell you more about it. Then you can decide if you want to join.

  Anyone who is at least 18 years old can volunteer. You don't have to be a Veteran or enrolled in VA health care. Your decision to join a study or not won't affect any of your VA benefits or services in any way.

  Learn more about volunteering for coronavirus research at VA (https://www.va.gov/coronavirus-research)

●Are authorized COVID-19 vaccines at VA different from vaccines received through research studies?

Yes. Our effort to provide authorized COVID-19 vaccines to Veterans and VA health care personnel is completely separate from our participation in COVID-19 research studies.

Here's what you need to know:

● An authorized COVID-19 vaccine is one that the FDA has determined is safe and effective for public use. If you're eligible to get COVID-19 vaccine at VA, you'll get an authorized vaccine.

● Research studies test new vaccines to help determine if they're truly safe and effective. Research studies require special enrollment and consent. We'll never give you a study vaccine unless you volunteer to join a study.

If you do volunteer for a study, the study team will talk with you about all the details of the study before you join. They'll explain all of the possible benefits and risks. And you can leave the study at any time.

A Message from the Veterans Service Agency Director

2020 was very different than the years before 2020. I am certain that it affected us all in a wide variety of ways—some good and some, not so good. But one thing that is certain is that we will persevere. We shall learn from life and continue to move ourselves, our families, and friends and fellow citizens upward.

We should work on assisting our Veterans and showing our appreciation to them. Our posts have had a difficult 2020. Vow to help them and vow to help other Veterans.

As we get further and further into 2021, please keep an eye out on the less fortunate, especially other Veterans who need your assistance. Remember to find those deceased Veterans that we will be able to honor when we are able to again. Our Honor-A-Deceased Veteran Ceremony has been postponed and on the back burner due to COVID-19, but the program will return and with your assistance, it will be even better.

Remember to take the time now to obtain your Lifetime Liberty Pass from New York State (40% or greater service-connected disability rating) and don't forget to take your DD-214 to County Clerk Frank Merola to obtain your Rensselaer County Return-the– Favor Discount Card. Remember to utilize those great businesses who offer their discounts to our Veterans. Let's also get the names of those living Veterans to out Rensselaer County Legislators so that the Legislature can honor our living Veterans. Contact them at (518) 270-2880 or email them at Rensselaercounty.org. This does not take much time and is very appreciated.

Join our wonderful local Veterans Service Organizations and Posts to continue to help other Veterans less fortunate than you. Let's all keep working to make our great Rensselaer County—the greatest County in New York State—even greater than it already is.

Thank you all for what you do for Veterans. Help all you can. Find your niche!

Sincerely,

Peter K. Goebel

COVID-19 Vaccine Information

COVID-19 vaccine distribution is now being managed by New York State. You can learn more about the State's COVID-19 plan here: https://covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov/

If you are eligible, you can schedule appointments with New York State's COVID-19 Vaccination Hotline: 1-833-NYS-4-VAX (1-833-697-4829) open 7am - 10pm, 7 days a week. Eligibility is determined by the state.

Please Note: Supplies of vaccine are currently very limited. Rensselaer County does not currently have a supply of vaccines. Those who are eligible should expect a wait of up to several weeks for an appointment because of limited supplies.

Rensselaer County will provide updates on vaccinations on the county website, social media, and in other media when new information is received. The county is also ready to assist when more vaccines are received.