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VA research on COVID-19

As one of the nation's leaders in health research, VA is working to find ways to prevent and treat COVID-19. Visit the website of VA's COVID-19 research [volunteer list](#) to learn how to participate in these efforts.

ABOUT COVID-19

- COVID-19 is a disease caused by a type of coronavirus. Symptoms include fever, cough, shortness of breath, and loss of taste or smell.
- Symptoms can range from mild to severe. Older adults and people with severe underlying medical conditions like heart or lung disease or diabetes are at higher risk for developing more serious complications from COVID-19.
- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), patients should seek emergency medical care if they have trouble breathing, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, confusion, inability to wake or stay awake, or bluish lips or face.
- The CDC recommends all eligible people receive a COVID-19 vaccination. VA offers vaccines to all Veterans, including those who do not receive their health care through VA, free of charge. Caregivers, spouses of Veterans, and surviving children and spouses who receive CHAMPVA benefits can also receive vaccines through VA. Some VA facilities offer walk-in vaccine appointments. At other facilities, patients should call or sign up online to make an appointment.
- VA is now offering vaccine booster shots to strengthen and extend protection. The

CDC recommends that everyone who received a two-dose mRNA COVID-19 vaccine get a booster shot six months after the second dose. People who received the single-dose vaccine should receive a booster two months after receiving the shot.

- VA [recommends](#) patients with more mild symptoms contact their doctor or VA medical center first before going to a clinic, urgent care, or emergency room, to protect against the spread of the virus.
- VA offers COVID-19 diagnostic testing for Veterans who are enrolled in VA health care and meet the [CDC testing criteria](#).

VA RESEARCH ON COVID-19: OVERVIEW

- In response to the pandemic, VA Research has undertaken a wide array of activities to support and advance VA's clinical and research missions and help Veterans affected by the disease.
- VA is both funding its own studies and working with industry partners to include VA sites in clinical trials for new vaccines and treatments. VA participated in trials that led to the approval of the currently available COVID-19 vaccines. VA is also coordinating with other federal agencies on national-scale studies on understanding the natural history of and treatments for COVID-19 or specimen collections from

patients with COVID-19, to aid in vaccine and therapeutics development.

- VA is using data and informatics expertise to create common elements for harmonized research and examining off-label use of approved medications. [VA's Evidence Synthesis Program](#) is rapidly synthesizing evidence from the available scientific literature and translating this evidence into usable guidance for clinicians in VA and beyond.
- Researchers and projects are being coordinated across VA to encourage best practices and avoid duplication. National VA data is also providing real-world evidence on disease patterns and treatment safety and effectiveness.
- VA has created a nationally coordinated COVID-19 biorepository that can adapt as future needs arise concerning other diseases. Biospecimens include those collected from clinical workflow, as well as those proactively collected specifically for targeted hypotheses on COVID-19.
- [VA SHIELD](#) is a comprehensive, secure biorepository of specimens and associated data related to COVID-19 and other emerging diseases. VA SeqCURE is a network of VA research labs that will generate genetic sequencing data for public health surveillance, working with VA SHIELD and other projects.

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SELECTED RESEARCH PROJECTS

- The wide-reaching “VA CURES” master protocol enables a series of clinical trials across VA. [VA CURES](#) offers a standardized framework for studies on many potential treatments for COVID-19, without the need for a new study design and protocol each time. It now serves as a partnering network for trials and VA trial sites.
- VA has been part of two major national research initiatives on COVID-19 vaccines and therapeutics: [Operation Warp Speed](#) (OWS) and the [Accelerated COVID-19 Therapeutic Interventions and Vaccines](#) (ACTIV) initiative. Through OWS, VA was an active participant in several clinical trials that evaluated COVID-19 vaccines. ACTIV, coordinated by the National Institutes of Health, is a public-private partnership to develop a coordinated research strategy for prioritizing and speeding development of the most promising treatments and vaccines.
- VA is collaborating with the Department of Defense on an observational, natural

history study of COVID-19, called [EPIC](#)³. Researchers are collecting data and biospecimens from volunteers for up to two years to better understand the clinical course of COVID-19.

- VA has undertaken several data analysis projects aimed at sharing data and increasing understanding of the virus and how it spreads. Some of these projects are through the [COVID-19 Insights Partnership](#). Others, involving genetics, are part of VA’s [Million Veteran Program](#).
- In partnership with the CDC, VA has undertaken the VA [SUPERNOVA](#) project. A network of five VA medical centers is conducting active and passive surveillance for acute gastroenteritis, a symptom of COVID-19 and other illnesses. The project will help track the geographic spread of the pathogen over time.
- The COVID-19 Observational Research Collaboratory (CORC) is a VA research initiative bringing together VA experts and clinical partners to analyze the use and effects of COVID-19 drugs. CORC is conducting a national three-year

study of VA inpatients and outpatients diagnosed with COVID-19, compared with matched controls. The study will use electronic health record data and surveys to assess risk factors and long-term symptoms.

- VA is conducting many other studies aimed at both understanding COVID-19 and finding new treatments. These studies include trials of potential medications such as remdesivir and arthritis medications that may benefit COVID-19 patients. Other studies are looking into how the disease affects patients with cancer, how dementia affects COVID-19 risk factors, and how the pandemic is impacting mental health. VA research is working on other projects such as testing 3D-printed masks for virus protection and working to boost the VA supply chain to provide personal protective equipment and testing materials to VA facilities.

For more information on VA research on COVID-19, please visit www.research.va.gov/covid-19

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