

# HEALTH BEAT

A health and wellness newsletter published by the VA Medical Center Huntington

Volume 2: Issue 1

## It's Time to Immunize: Adults Need Immunizations Too!

As the children are getting ready for school this fall, they are keeping the pediatrician's offices and health centers buzzing with pre-school immunizations and well child visits.

Often, adults feel they have completed all their necessary immunizations, but the Center for Disease Control (CDC) has recommendations for all ages. Preventive health care, including immunizations, helps us remain our very "healthy best." When you visit your primary care providers this fall, be sure to ask what immunizations are recommended for you.

Influenza vaccine (flu shot) is recommended for all adults 50 years old and older and for specific individuals aged 19-49. Talk to your primary care provider about the flu shot and to determine your personal need.

Pneumococcal (pneumonia) vaccine is recommended at age 65 or older. Those who smoke or have chronic medical problems should ask their health care provider about this vaccination, which may be given as young as 19 years if indicated.

H1N1 (swine flu) vaccine will be in addition to the season flu vaccine offered annually. The H1N1 vaccination is recommended for children up to 19 years of age, and certain individuals with chronic health care problems. Ask your provider if you should consider being immunized.

Tetanus, Diphtheria and Pertussis (TD, Tdap) vaccination is given initially in 3 spaced doses. If you have never been immunized for Tetanus, Diphtheria and Pertussis you should talk with your health



care provider about starting this immunization series now.

It is recommended that adults receive a TD booster every 10 years. If you haven't had the Pertussis (whooping cough) containing vaccine as an adult you should have one of the doses containing Pertussis known as Tdap. Be sure to talk with your health care provider about your immunization needs

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# High Risk Groups Need Both H1N1 and Seasonal Flu Vaccines

Influenza (flu) is a respiratory illness caused by flu viruses. Seasonal flu occurs each year and spreads easily from person to person. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), on average, 226,000 people are hospitalized and 36,000 people die from seasonal flu complications annually in the United States.

This flu season could be worse because of the development of a new and very different flu virus called

novel influenza A (H1N1), or H1N1 flu. The CDC expects both 2009 H1N1 flu and seasonal flu to cause illness, hospital stays, and even death. Getting both a seasonal flu shot and an H1N1 flu shot are important steps in protecting yourself against flu.

Vaccination is especially important for people at high risk, including young children, pregnant women, and people with chronic health conditions like asthma, di-

abetes, or heart and lung disease. Another important group is health care workers as well as those who live with or care for high-risk people. The Women Veterans Health Strategic Health Care Group wants to remind women that taking the time to get your own flu shots is as important as taking the time to get flu shots for your children and family. For more information, visit [www.publichealth.va.gov](http://www.publichealth.va.gov).

# Veterans Affairs Warns Veterans of Telephone Prescription Scam

VA is warning Veterans not to give credit card numbers over the phone to callers claiming to update VA prescription information.

“America’s Veterans have become targets in an inexcusable scam that dishonors their service and misrepresents the De-

partment built for them,” said Dr. Gerald Cross, VA’s Under Secretary for Health. “VA simply does not call Veterans and ask them to disclose personal financial information over the phone.”

Veteran Service Organizations have brought to VA’s attention that callers are misrepresenting the VA to gain personal information over the phone. They say VA

recently changed procedures for dispensing prescriptions and ask for the Veteran’s credit card number.

“VA has not changed its processes for dispensing prescription medicines,” Cross said. “Nor has VA changed its long-standing commitment to protect the personal information of this nation’s Veterans.”

Huntington area Veterans with questions about VA services should contact the Medical Center at 304-429-6741 or call, toll-free, 1-877-827-8244.

## Important Numbers

If you have an emergency please dial 911 or your local emergency number.

If you are feeling unsafe or having thoughts of hurting yourself please call 1-800-273-TALK(8255).

Huntington VA Medical Center (HVAMC)	
Toll Free .....	800-827-8244
Local .....	304-429-6755
Charleston Outpatient Clinic .....	304-926-6001
Prestonsburg Outpatient Clinic .....	606-886-1970
Logan Outpatient Clinic .....	304-752-8355
Williamson Outpatient Clinic .....	304-235-2187
Huntington Vet Center .....	304-523-8387
Charleston Vet Center .....	304-343-3825
VA Regional Office .....	800-827-1000



Want to receive the latest edition of Health Beat and other VA newsletters by e-mail?

Go to the Medical Center's Web site at [www.huntington.va.gov](http://www.huntington.va.gov), and click on the News by E-mail link to sign up.

# First step of Reaching Out is Always The Hardest

*By Tammy Miller,  
Suicide Prevention Coordinator*

Recently, I attended an event in the community in an effort to increase awareness about suicide. I was not surprised that some individuals would take one look at the topic and almost do an about face to avoid talking to me.

Even the individuals who wanted to step away but were too courteous would reply, "This isn't a problem for me". Most people are uncomfortable when talking about suicide. Yet a person dies about every 16 minutes in the United States from suicide.

Researchers tell us that suicide is the 11th ranking cause of death in the nation. They also tell us that our Veterans are at risk of dying by suicide. At the Huntington VA, we strive to reduce the risk of losing our Nation's Heroes to suicide. One way to reduce the risk of suicide is by increasing our knowledge of the problem. If you have read this far, you have taken a step to increasing your knowledge about suicide. The more we know about suicide, the more we will be able to address the problem.

Warning signs can help identify the problem. Over 70 percent of individuals who kill themselves tell someone they are thinking about suicide or give warning signs. Warnings signs can include:

- Threats of suicide or talking about wanting to hurt or kill oneself
- Focusing on death or dying
- Feeling hopeless
- Feeling depressed or sad
- Withdrawing from others
- Increased anger
- Engaging in risky or impulsive behavior
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Giving things of value or prized possessions to others
- Getting things in order in terms of financial considerations, life insurance policies
- Having no sense of purpose, feeling worthless, useless

If you or someone you know is experiencing these feelings, it is important to seek medical treatment immediately. The Mental Health Clinic has trained professionals available to help you deal with these feelings. You can also call the Veteran's Suicide Hotline, 1-800-273-8255, 24/7 to talk with a trained counselor.

## Hope Starts Here!

Huntington VA Mental Health Clinic: 1-800-827-8244 Ext. 2722, 2723

Veteran's Suicide Hotline: 1-800-276-8255, Press "1" for Veterans

Huntington VA Suicide Prevention Program: 1-800-827-8244 Ext. 3716

## Timeliness is Important to Us



### Our 20 Minute Wait Time Goal

It's very important to us to ensure that you are seen in a timely manner. One of our primary goals is for our providers to see you within 20 minutes of your scheduled appointment time. We know that sometimes that isn't possible due to unforeseen events. However, if you are not seen within 20 minutes, we want to know about it! Please tell the clinic clerk if you have been waiting more than 20 minutes past your appointment time. Keep in mind, the 20 minute wait time starts at the time of the scheduled appointment, not the time you arrive.

Help us meet our goal by being on time and by calling at least 24 hours in advance if you are unable to keep your appointment! If for any reason you are not able to rate our service as excellent, please let us know before you leave.

## Recovery Coordinators Offer Hope to Veterans Facing Substance Abuse Issues

By Chuck Weinberg, LICSW, BCD,  
Local Recovery Coordinator

Recovery is an idea for individuals with substance abuse problems, emotional problems, or even physical stressors. Those with substance abuse problems often have other additional emotional problems, and face a hard road.

They must learn about and face the nature of their illnesses, and with support work to take responsibility to cope and deal with their specific problems.

Veterans, because of the stress of their experiences, sometimes turn to substances to try to handle things, with unfortunate consequences. Family members and loved ones are also affected. Substance abuse increases the risk of dangerous behaviors, such as suicide or violence.

But there is hope. Recovery means the hope to regain control of one's life. Recovery involves respect for

the rights and choices of individuals, while offering support and a path towards a better future.

Recovery involves having a network of support, a team that may consist of health care professionals, family, clergy and friends.

Recovery involves having the courage to face the nature of our problems, the persistence to work hard to take steps by asking for help to help ourselves.

Sometimes working closely with others with similar problems, peers, can lead to Recovery. Mike Ellis, peer support specialist, in discussing Recovery and Hope, says that there is, "always the certainty of the possibility of things getting better."

If you think you may have a substance abuse problem, please reach out and seek out some help and support, to get on the road to Recovery.

We have a Substance Abuse Treatment Program, and additional mental health services available here at VAMC Huntington. We are only a phone call away. We will be glad to help you in your Recovery.

For more information, contact Chuck Weinberg, Local Recovery Coordinator, at 304-429-6755, ext. 3721 or by e-mail at Charles.Weinberg@va.gov.

### *Immunizations*

#### *Continued from Pg. 1*

in regard to TD/Tdap. If you have a dirty or deep wound you need to speak with your provider as well, as an additional booster may be indicated.

Zoster (shingles) vaccination is recommended for adults aged 60 years or older. Certain groups of individuals may have other immunization needs. For example, young adults going to college, planning to live in dorms have a recommendation to receive the meningococcal vaccination. Others with certain chronic medical conditions may need this immunization as well.

Young women, who are 26 years old and younger, are encouraged to have the HPV (Human Papillomavirus) vaccine.

Other vaccinations, such as Hepatitis B and A, and MMR (Measles, Mumps and Rubella) and Chicken Pox (varicella) are recommended for certain individuals as well, and you should ask your primary care provider whether you should consider these immunizations as well.

If you plan to travel outside of the continental United States, be sure to inquire about immunizations that are necessary, or recommended for your safety.

Immunizations are one way to protect your health, and are not just for children! You are never too old to immunize-keep up with your preventive health care and we will see a healthy YOU in the fall!

**NATIONAL**  
**SUICIDE**  
**PREVENTION**  
**LIFELINE™**  
**I-800-273-8255**  
[www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

# 2009 H1N1 Flu

## Information for Veterans and VA Staff

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu)

May 8, 2009

### What is H1N1 Flu?



Photo credit: CDC

H1N1 flu (formerly known as swine flu), caused by a subtype of flu virus, is a contagious respiratory illness. There are three types of flu viruses: A, B and C. One subtype of flu A virus is H1N1. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has determined that this H1N1 flu is contagious and is spreading from human to human.

### How does H1N1 Flu spread?

Spread of the H1N1 flu is thought to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with flu. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Keep yourself in good general health – get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick with flu, CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
- Keep informed about H1N1 flu in your community and workplace – note school or work place closings or restrictions in social gatherings.

SafeGuarding and Serving

VETERANS AND VA FIGHT THE  
2009 H1N1 FLU

Department of Veterans Affairs  
[www.publichealth.va.gov](http://www.publichealth.va.gov)

 Department of  
Veterans Affairs

## How can someone with the flu infect someone else?

Infected people may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 7 or more days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

## What are the signs and symptoms in people?

The symptoms of H1N1 flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu and include:

- fever,
- cough,
- sore throat,
- body aches,
- headache,
- chills, and
- fatigue.

A significant number of people who have been infected with this virus also have reported diarrhea and vomiting.

## DID YOU KNOW

...you **CANNOT** get H1N1 flu from eating pork.

...your seasonal flu vaccination does **NOT** protect you from H1N1 flu. However, getting vaccinated each year is still your best protection from seasonal flu.

...the actions you take can help slow the spread of flu and reduce its impact.



The main Federal web site for information is [www.cdc.gov/H1N1](http://www.cdc.gov/H1N1)

The main VA Internet site is [www.publichealth.va.gov](http://www.publichealth.va.gov)  
and, for VA staff only, [vawww.vhaco.va.gov/pubhealth/H1N1Flu/index.htm](http://vawww.vhaco.va.gov/pubhealth/H1N1Flu/index.htm)

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards (13)  
810 Vermont Ave  
Washington, DC 20420  
[www.publichealth.va.gov](http://www.publichealth.va.gov)

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## National White Cane Safety Day

The first special White Cane Ordinance was passed in Peoria, Illinois in December 1930. It gave blind pedestrians protections and right-of-way while carrying a white cane. In the early 1960's, organizations and rehabilitation agencies serving the blind and visually impaired urged Congress to proclaim October 15 of each year to be White Cane Safety Day in all fifty states. In 1964, a joint resolution of the Congress, HR 753, was signed into law authorizing the President of the United States to proclaim October 15 of each year as "White Cane Safety Day" and was signed within hours of passage.

President Lyndon B. Johnson first proclaimed National White Cane Safety Day in 1964 with these words, "A white cane in our society has become one of the symbols of a blind person's ability to come and go on his own. Its use has promoted courtesy and special consideration for the blind on our streets and highways. To make our people more fully aware of the meaning of the white cane, and of the need for motorists to exercise special care for the blind persons who carry it, the Congress, by a joint resolution has authorized the President to proclaim October 15 of each year as White Cane Safety Day."

### History Of The White Cane

There are references in the Bible in Deuteronomy and in Ancient Greek Mythology about giving a staff to a blind man. It is known that in Scotland in 1800 blind men used a stick or cane, but it is not clear how they used it. In 1874, a man named Levy in England came up with the first organized cane system. His system was

not truly practical. A man carried a stick that was very tall. He would hold it straight up and down. He then would move it from side to side and walk very slowly. Levy did talk about extending the cane forward when looking for drop-offs.

In the 1890's a man named Robinson, also in England, came up with another method. He had a man hold a metal cane. The person would hold the cane straight up and down also. He would then swing the cane back and forth like the pendulum of a clock. This was not a very practical system; however, his idea of a metal cane was very innovative. He also noticed that roads were crowned in the middle, that people tend to go to the right as they walk, and that people pick up information through their feet.

During World War I the British rehabilitated their war blind at St. Dunstan's. They used a fairly modern technique that had the person holding the cane forward and using a side-to-side movement.

In the period between the World Wars, the Lions Club advocated for laws protecting the visually impaired from motorists. They provided white canes with red tips so that the visually impaired pedestrian could be clearly identified. The red and white color for canes still is used today.

Veterans blinded in WWII were the inspiration for the development of lightweight canes and travel techniques still used today. The basis of modern Long Cane travel came from the Army and a remarkable man named Richard Hoover. Most of his techniques are seen today in the cane travel.

## Fruits and Vegetables Help Reduce Risk of Certain Diseases

*By Natalie Bullins, Registered Dietitian VAMC Nutrition and Food Services*

Eating generous amounts of fruits and vegetables as part of a healthful diet, has been shown to reduce the risk of certain diseases, such as stroke, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and certain cancers. Substituting fruits and vegetables for higher calorie foods can also help with weight loss efforts.

To get the recommended amounts, most of us need to increase the number of servings we eat daily. Enjoying a variety of fruits and vegetables of different colors provides a wide range of valuable nutrients,

such as fiber, folate, potassium and natural antioxidants such as vitamins A, C, and E.

Your age, gender and activity level determines how many calories you need each day, and your calorie needs determine how many servings you should have. A person who needs 2,200 calories should eat 2 cups of fruit and 3 cups of vegetables each day. To figure out your recommended number of servings, go to the Web site [www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov](http://www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov) and visit How Many Fruits and Vegetables Do You need?

The choices for getting more fruits and vegetables into our day are

endless and delicious. Give these recipes a try!

### Vegetable Primavera

Choose a combination of different vegetables, such as mushrooms, tomatoes, cauliflower, and bell peppers. Cut into bite-sized pieces. Saute in a skillet with non-stick cooking spray or small amount of oil. Toss with your favorite pasta and add garlic and basil. Top with low fat or fat-free parmesan cheese.

### Sweet Potato Fries

Cut uncooked sweet potatoes into thin slices. Dip slices in a mixture of egg substitute and nutmeg. Spray a baking pan with non-stick cooking spray. Bake for 20 minutes at 425 degrees.

## VA's Suicide Prevention Program Adds Chat Service

VA's Suicide Prevention campaign is expanding outreach to all Veterans by piloting an online, one-to-one "chat service" for Veterans who prefer reaching out for assistance using the Internet.

Called "Veterans Chat," the new service enables Veterans, their families and friends to go online where they can anonymously chat with a trained VA counselor. If a "chatter" is determined to be in a crisis, the counselor can take immediate steps to transfer the person to the VA Suicide Prevention Hotline, where further counseling and referral services are provided and crisis intervention steps can be taken.

"This online feature is intended to reach out to all Veterans who may

or may not be enrolled in the VA health care system and provide them with online access to the Suicide Prevention Lifeline," said Dr. Gerald Cross, VA's Acting Under Secretary for Health. "It is meant to provide Veterans with an anonymous way to access VA's suicide prevention services."

Veterans, family members or friends can access Veterans Chat through the suicide prevention Web site ([www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)). There is a Veterans tab on the left-hand side of the website that will take them directly to Veteran resource information. On this page, they can see the Hotline number (1-800-273-TALK), and click on the

Veterans Chat tab on the right side of the Web page to enter.

The pilot program, which has been in operation since July 3, has already had positive results. In one instance, the online counselor determined that a Veteran in the chat required immediate assistance. The counselor convinced the Veteran to provide the counselor with a home telephone number and then remained in the chat room with the Veteran while the hotline staff called the number and talked to the Veteran's mother. The hotline counselor worked with the Veteran's mother to convince the Veteran to be admitted to a medical facility for further treatment.