

Department of Veterans Affairs Announces Process for Charting the Course

Agency Plan on Returning to Pre-COVID-19 Operations

VA Releases Three-Phase Plan for Post-COVID-19 Operations That Maximizes Veterans' Safety

Today, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced a [three-phase plan](#) for resuming regular operations at its medical centers, benefit offices and national cemeteries in a post-COVID-19 setting.

VA never closed its doors during the pandemic but did implement a wide range of actions to ensure the safety of its patients and employees. Under VA's plan, conditions on the ground will determine how quickly each facility resumes normal operations, and each phase of the plan is aimed at making sure that Veterans' safety comes first.

"A central planning solution for resuming regular operations makes no sense here because some areas of the country will take longer to recover, while other areas have seen minimal cases," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "That's why we're letting local conditions dictate our next steps."

VA medical facilities will be permitted to embark on Phase 1 of the plan once certain local conditions have been met. These conditions include falling numbers of patients exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms, reduced numbers of people testing positive for the virus, and increased testing capacity.

Once these and other conditions are met, local VA facilities will maintain their current risk-mitigation activities (such as continued telework when possible) but may also begin assessing how best to permit elective procedures and resume certain face-to-face visits that have been postponed.

Phase 2 of the plan is the resumption of services that have been postponed, again as deemed possible based on local conditions, and subject to safety protocols deemed as necessary by local staff.

In Phase 3, VA facilities will again allow visitors to hospitals, community living centers, senior living facilities, and spinal cords injury and disorder units after a full assessment of the risks and only amid continuing improvement in their part of the country. Most VA employees will also return to work in this phase.

VA's national cemeteries, benefit administrators and Board of Veterans Appeals will also be using this same three-phase approach to determine whether and how best to resume things like public cemetery interments and face-to-face meetings with Veterans about their benefit status.