

Veteran Updates

Your Best Defense Against Flu

Did you know 36,000 Americans die each year from the flu? Ninety percent of deaths due to flu occur in people age 65 and older. Our best defense is to get a flu vaccine.

Influenza is a contagious, unpredictable virus that visits us every year, and each year it arrives in a new form. It is spread mainly from person to person by coughing, sneezing, or speaking with someone who has the flu, and can also spread by touching something with the virus on it, and then touching your mouth, eyes, or nose.

Here are some main weapons to use against the flu from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- Get your flu vaccine!
- Wash your hands often with soap and water.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs can enter your body this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people, coughs and sneezes.

Myths about flu are everywhere, and it's hard to know the truth about the flu. Here a few of the most popular myths:

Flu Myth #1: The flu vaccine can give you the flu.

Fact: You cannot get the flu from the flu vaccine; the injected flu vaccine contains only dead, inactive viruses. Some people may get minor body aches, headaches or a low-grade fever after receiving their vaccine, but this is not the flu.

Flu Myth #2: The flu is only dangerous for the elderly.

Fact: It's true that those over the age of 65 are most likely to become seriously ill or die from the flu. But the flu can be risky for anyone, even healthy young adults.

Flu Myth #3: If you've had the flu, you can't get it again.

Fact: There are many flu virus strains, and you can get the flu even if you'd had it in the past. The strains that appear are different each year.

When flu shots become available at SFBVAMC, all patients with a scheduled medical appointment may receive their vaccine during their appointment.

Another option is to visit the Medical Practice Drop-in Flu Clinic in Bldg. 200, 1st Floor, Monday – Friday (except for federal holidays) from 8:30 a.m. – 12 noon, and 1 – 3:30 p.m.

VA Partners with Walgreens for Flu Vaccines

As part of expanded access to preventive health care, this year the VA has partnered with Walgreens* to make getting your flu vaccine even more convenient.

If you choose to get your seasonal flu shot at Walgreens, they can send your immunization record electronically and securely to your local VA medical center.

Important information, including the type of immunization, the date, and the immunization provider will become part of your VA electronic health record.

Just show the Walgreens clinician your Veteran ID card and let them know you would like your information provided to the VA.

Walgreens accepts most insurance plans, including Medicare. If you do not have insurance, there may be a charge for the flu shot.

(*Reference to non-VA pharmacies such as Walgreens does not constitute or imply VA endorsement.)

Veterans Crisis Line: Help is a Phone Call Away

If you are a Veteran in crisis, confidential support is only a phone call, click, or text away, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

The Veterans Crisis Line, online chat, and text-messaging service are free to all Veterans, even if you are not registered with the VA or enrolled in VA health care.

Just call (800) 273-8255 and press "1", or send a text to 838255, or chat online at www.VeteransCrisisLine.net.

The Veterans Crisis Line is staffed by caring, qualified VA responders—many of whom are Veterans themselves.

Crisis feels different for everybody and can arise from situations before, during, or after military service. Some Veterans are coping with aging, stress, difficulties in their relationships, transitioning back to employment, or education.

Whatever's got you down, chronic pain, anxiety, depression, sleeplessness, anger, or even homelessness, a Veterans Crisis Line responder can provide support, day or night. Make the call. Get the help you've earned.

Restoring Joy: Guitars for Vets at Santa Rosa VA Clinic

Medical Social Worker Christiane Swartz, LCSW, of the Santa Rosa VA Clinic was looking for a way to bring music to her Veteran patients when she discovered "Guitars for Vets."

She had a conversation with Santa Rosa Clinic Medical Support Assistant and seasoned guitar player David Clancy. The two collaborated on how they could involve "Guitars for Vets" to bring guitar lessons (and the gift of a new guitar to patients who complete the program) to some of their Santa Rosa patients who had been exposed to trauma.

With the help of the national chapter, a local "Guitars for Vets Santa Rosa Chapter" was formed.

The program provides for 10 weeks of free guitar lessons at the Santa Rosa VA Clinic (conducted after regular clinic hours so as not to disturb patients or staff) by volunteer guitar instructors David Clancy and fellow guitarist, Medical Support Assistant Kevin Foley.

The local chapters garner supplies for the program solely through donations of new or gently used acoustic guitars, new strings, picks, and books, and provide volunteer guitar instructors.

The "Guitars for Vets" national chapter provides each local



Veteran Randy Freeman receives his new guitar at the Santa Rosa VA Clinic after completing 10 weeks of guitar lessons through the Guitars for Vets Program. Pictured from left: Kevin Foley, Christiane Swartz, Randy Freeman, and David Clancy.

chapter with new acoustic guitars to gift to Veteran patients who successfully complete their 10 weeks of lessons.

Santa Rosa VA Clinic patients may be referred to the program through their provider, or by emailing Christiane at G4Vsantarosa@gmail.com.

Referrals may also be made by calling Kevin directly at (707) 569-2524, or by calling the Santa Rosa VA Clinic front desk at (707) 569-2300 and asking for David Clancy, Christiane Swartz or Kevin Foley.

