

*An Open Letter from the Directors of the  
James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital in Tampa and Bay Pines VA Healthcare System in Bay Pines, Florida*

Dear Veterans, Family Members, Staff and Community Partners,

As our nation continues to respond to the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) public health emergency, we want you to know that James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital and Bay Pines VA Healthcare System have been working together closely, along with the rest of our fellow VA hospitals across Florida, southern Georgia and the Caribbean Islands, to plan and prepare. We stand ready for the challenges we face here in the Tampa Bay area in the days and weeks to come.

The realities we are all facing are unprecedented and has required our healthcare systems to make swift and deliberate changes to protect the health and wellbeing of the heroes we serve and our professional staff who deliver care.

Very early on, we developed plans and took action to ensure our facilities could continue meeting the health care needs of our patients. Conducting mandatory screenings, restricting visitation, closing outpatient clinics, and transitioning from face-to-face appointments to virtual appointments, among other things, are all actions that were necessary and responsible. We very much understand that many of these changes have been inconvenient. Please know we are working very hard to mitigate stress and inconvenience; however, the decisions we have made and will continue to make are all efforts to protect you.

For everyone's safety during the COVID-19 response, we have taken necessary steps to limit visitors to our facilities. We know staying connected with loved ones can have a positive impact on a patient's health and well-being and it's important for family to stay in touch and aware of a patient's status throughout their care. Thanks to today's internet and other social media tools, virtual visits are easier than ever. And we promise, as soon as we can safely transition toward normal visitations, we will do just that.

We've implemented aggressive internal measures to ensure employees are safe and have the appropriate equipment and supplies to continue providing much needed care while protecting them from exposure. If our employees cannot perform their jobs, we cannot fulfill our mission.

Our plans are not perfect, and we will continue to confront challenges, but know that we are committed to ensuring all employees have a workplace environment that is safe and where they can continue delivering on VA's promise to Veterans.

Lastly, as individuals, we all have a role to play to mitigate the infection and spread of COVID-19. We urge all of you to not wait until local, state or federal leaders mandate public restrictions before you take action. By taking responsibility today, we can collectively slow the spread of COVID-19 and ultimately improve public health outcomes.

Below, we have included some important online resources that we encourage you to review. By being informed, working together and taking action now we can win this fight!

- VAMC Operational Updates – <https://www.tampa.va.gov/emergency/index.asp>  
<https://www.baypines.va.gov/BAYPINES/emergency/index.asp>
- Social Media – Facebook (Tampa: <https://www.facebook.com/VATampa/>) and Bay Pines (<https://www.facebook.com/VABayPines/>)
- VA Public Health – [www.publichealth.va.gov/n-coronavirus/index.asp](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/n-coronavirus/index.asp)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html)
- Florida Department of Health – [www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/COVID-19/covid19-toolkit.html](http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/COVID-19/covid19-toolkit.html)

Sincerely,



Joe D. Battle  
James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital Director, Tampa



Paul M. Russo, MHSA, FACHE, RD  
Bay Pines VA Healthcare System Director/CEO

