

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL



November 2011

The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St.

Petersburg

VA Regional Office web site at <http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg/>.

2011 COST OF LIVING ADJUSTMENT The 2011 Cost of Living Adjustment for Social Security is 3.6 percent, effective December 1, 2011. Veterans disability benefits are usually increased by the same amount, but that is not automatic. Congress must pass legislation each year for the increase.

On October 19, 2011, the Senate passed S 894, *The Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Act of 2011*, which directs VA to give disabled veterans the same increase on the same effective date as Social Security. The House passed its own version of the bill, HR 1407, on May 24. However, the bill can not go to the President until final passage by both the House and Senate.

VA Pension and Parents Dependency and Indemnity Compensation benefits are automatically increased.

VA URGING OEF/OIF/OND VETERANS TO CONSIDER POSSIBLE RABIES EXPOSURE

(<http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/rabies/>) Veterans of Operations Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom, and New Dawn (OEF/OIF/OND) who were bitten or exposed in some other way to the saliva of a warm-blooded animal while deployed should be evaluated for the risk of rabies exposure by a health care professional.

The risk of being exposed to rabies is much higher for those who served in parts of the world, including Iraq and Afghanistan, where domestic animals are not vaccinated against rabies. Recently a U.S. soldier who had served in Afghanistan died of rabies. Veterans should contact a health care provider if they think they may be at risk.

OEF/OIF/OND veterans who were bitten or had contact with the saliva from a warm-blooded animal such as a dog, cat, bat, fox, skunk, raccoon, mongoose or jackal while deployed in the previous 18 months are advised to seek medical care. This includes those veterans who did not have a complete medical evaluation or post-exposure prophylaxis (rabies vaccine and immunoglobulin) following an exposure incident. Rabies prophylaxis is treatment given after exposure to prevent rabies.

Rabies symptoms: Persons who were exposed to rabies may not have any symptoms. By the time any symptoms appear, rabies often cannot be successfully treated. As the disease progresses, the person may experience delirium, hallucinations, slight or partial paralysis, anxiety, confusion, increase in saliva, difficulty swallowing, fear of water, and insomnia. Death usually occurs within days of the onset of these symptoms.

What should persons who were bitten or exposed while deployed do? Get evaluated as soon as possible. Discuss what happened and what, if any, treatment received with a health care provider. It is often impossible to know if the animal had rabies. Rabies is a very serious disease. VA wants to understand veterans' specific cases and discuss treatment options with them. A health care provider will help do this. Veterans concerned about their risk for rabies should talk to their health care providers or contact the nearest VA health care facility. Veterans exposed more than 18 months ago are at lower risk but still can be evaluated by VA if they are enrolled.

OCTOBER 1, 2011 INCREASE IN CERTAIN BURIAL AND FUNERAL BENEFITS AND PLOT ALLOWANCES FOR VETERANS Effective October 1, 2011, burial and plot benefits for veterans whose deaths were not service related are increased from \$300 to \$700 for burial reimbursement for veterans who died while properly hospitalized by VA, and plot reimbursement for veterans who are entitled to receive compensation or pension benefits, or are otherwise eligible for a plot allowance. The increased rate applies for deaths occurring on or after October 1, 2011. The term "properly hospitalized by VA" includes facilities in which the deceased was properly admitted for hospital, nursing home, or domiciliary care by VA.

VA LAUNCHES OUTREACH CAMPAIGN TO ELIMINATE HOMELESSNESS AMONG VETERANS (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – As part of its drive to end homelessness among Veterans by 2015, the Department of Veterans Affairs is launching a nation-wide outreach initiative, "Make the Call," to spread the message about its special programs to help homeless veterans and their

families. VA is encouraging family, friends and citizens in the community to "Make the Call" and help prevent and end homelessness among veterans. Since March 2010, VA has offered a toll-free telephone number, staffed around the clock by trained professionals, to help homeless veterans, their families and at-risk people. The number is 877-4AID-VET (or 877-424-3838).

Recently, VA has transformed its efforts in the fight against homelessness. It is changing from a program focus upon temporary, shelter-based services, to prevention, employment, permanent housing, and help to families and veterans at risk of becoming homeless.

VA'S VETERAN CANTEEN SERVICE HELPING HOMELESS VETERANS (VA News Release)

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs is reaching out to homeless veterans by providing free meals and spending money to eligible homeless veterans. The free meals will be offered at Veterans Canteen Service (VCS) cafeterias to homeless veterans attending their first VA medical appointment. New veterans participating in the Housing and Urban Development and VA Supportive Housing program, <http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/index.asp>, who present signed leases will also receive a \$20 coupon to be used in VCS retail stores located at every VA medical center.

VETERANS DAY The fighting of World War I ceased in 1918 when an armistice, or temporary cessation of hostilities, between the Allied nations and Germany went into effect on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month. For that reason, November 11, 1918, is generally regarded as the end of "the war to end all wars."

In November 1919, President Wilson proclaimed November 11 as the first commemoration of "Armistice Day." An Act of Congress approved May 13, 1938, made the 11th of November in each year Armistice Day, a legal holiday. In 1954 the Act of 1938 was amended by striking out the word "Armistice" and inserting in its place the word "Veterans." With the approval of this legislation November 11th became a day to honor American veterans of all wars.

Many people confuse Memorial Day and Veterans Day. Memorial Day is a day for remembering and honoring military personnel who died in the service of their country, particularly those who died in battle or as a result of wounds sustained in battle. Veterans Day is the day set aside to thank and honor *all* those who served honorably in the military - in wartime or peacetime. In fact, Veterans Day is largely intended to thank *living* veterans for their service and to underscore the fact that all those who served - not only those who died - have sacrificed and done their duty.

"Veterans Day," not "Veteran's Day" or "Veterans' Day" is the correct spelling. "Veterans Day" does not include an apostrophe but does include an "s" at the end of "Veterans" because it is not a day that "belongs" to

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-8255

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 1-800-827-1000

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)

Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications 1-877-823-2378

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) 1-877-838-2778

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - 1-877-222-8387

VA Health Revenue Service (information on amounts owed to VA Medical Centers) 1-866-793-4591

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 1-800-669-8477

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -

CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023

CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024

Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 1-800-733-8387

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL 727-398-9426

6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 352-793-7740

6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 561-649-6489

4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL 904-766-5222

Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL 850-453-4108/4846

9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL 877-861-9840

104 Marine St, St Augustine FL 352-793-7740

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 5109 Russell Rd Quantico VA 22134-3903 1-800-697-6947

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 1-888-244-6711

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit - Chicago VA Regional Office 1-800-829-4833

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: www.va.gov

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) www.warms.vba.va.gov

St. Petersburg VA Regional Office:

<http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg/>

Property Management (sale of VA-repossessed homes): <http://va.reotrans.com/>

Federal employment: www.usajobs.opm.gov

Florida Dept of Veterans' Affairs: www.FloridaVets.org

Library of Congress (information on pending legislation) thomas.loc.gov