

VA Manila (RO&OPC) <vamanila@va.gov>

Jan 14 at 1:00 AM

Special Update regarding Volcanic Eruption of Taal Volcano

- As of Monday, January 13, 2020, VA Manila remains open to Veterans both with scheduled appointments and those seeking same-day/walk-in care. VA Manila follows the determination of the United States Embassy regarding our operating schedule. Veterans may wish to confirm the US Embassy is open (see US Embassy Website: <https://ph.usembassy.gov/>) prior to traveling to Manila. You may also wish to follow the US Embassy on Twitter (<https://twitter.com/USEmbassyPH>) for up to the minute updates.
- All Veterans are advised to follow the recommendations of the US Embassy American Citizen Services, and local authorities / law enforcement regarding the potential need for evacuations. Currently, evacuations are limited to the areas immediately surrounding Lake Taal. But be advised that Volcanic Ash is currently falling throughout the Metro Manila and National Capital Regions. According to the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHILVOLCS), volcanic ash fall can cause irritation and breathing problems, especially among the elderly and children. Residents of affected areas are advised to protect their mouths and noses using N95 grade facemasks or wet clothing or towel, and to limit their exposure outdoors until the volcanic ash subsides.
- Visitors and Residents in the Philippines alike are encouraged to enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) – to receive real-time updates from the US Embassy with travel warnings and alerts. You can enroll by visiting <http://step.state.gov>. More information can be found at <http://travel.state.gov>.
- With air travel currently disrupted in the Philippines with the closure of Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA), some Veteran's medication shipments may be delayed, particularly those requiring air travel to islands other than Luzon. VA Manila's Pharmacy is reviewing medication shipments from late last week and will reach out to those Veterans who may be impacted by a potential shipping delay. Veterans awaiting service-connected medications are eligible to use the Foreign Medical Program and be reimbursed any costs with seeking service-connected care from local, community providers.

MANILA VA OUTPATIENT CLINIC

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND REMINDERS

January 2020

1. UPDATES FROM THE CLINIC MANAGER

Manigong Bagong Taon and Gong Xi Fa Cai! I hope you all had a joyful and relaxing holiday season, and that your 2020 is off to a tremendous start.

A few brief updates as we start the new year:

- Construction on the Roxas Blvd. Service Road continues outside of the Clinic's entrance, impacting the availability of parking. We've been advised by the US Embassy and the Pasay City / MMDA authorities the project is scheduled to conclude in April. We will continue to keep you apprised on the timeline and completion.
- The Clinic will be participating in the US Embassy Outreach Events in Angeles and Olongapo this week (Thursday and Friday, 1/16-17), and a third outreach event in Baguio at the end of January. Additional details are included below. Please feel free to stop by and see our Clinical and Benefits Teams if you have questions. Pneumonia and TDAP vaccines will be available. The Philippine Flu season ended in December 2019. Flu vaccines will resume in June/July 2020.
- We've selected a new part-time Mental Health Provider and anticipate her start dates in the next 45 days. We've also upgraded our Audiology equipment and it is now operational, and new, state of the art laboratory equipment is currently being installed. VA Manila will continue to make improvements throughout the clinic to improve Veteran care.

- For Veterans who use the AudioCare automated refill line to request medication renewals, please note the new number: #MyVA, Option 8 (or 02-8550-3888, Option 8).

As always, I appreciate hearing from Veterans – both with positive complements and constructive feedback. Please feel free to contact my office by phone directly: +63-02-8396-3735, or email me at: daniel.gutkoski2@va.gov. If I haven't responded to your email after a few days, please give me a call. Sometimes, depending on your email provider, some e-mail messages are rejected from our email system.

Thank you for your military service for our Nation, and for allowing VA Manila to be your medical home. All of us here send our warmest wishes on a prosperous, and, most importantly, healthy 2020 for you and your family.

2. **UPCOMING CLINIC CLOSURES:**

The U.S. Embassy, along with the VA Manila Regional Office and Outpatient Clinic, will be closed in recognition of the following public holidays:

US Birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Monday, January 20, 2020

US Washington's Birthday (President's Day)

Monday, February 17, 2020

NOTE: Plan ahead and order your refills 10 work days in advance of holiday closures. Air21 is also closed on these holidays so medications will be delayed if you fail to request refills 10 days in advance. If you run out of medications for a service-connected condition, you can buy the medicine and file a claim for reimbursement from the FMP.

3. **UPCOMING VA OUTREACH EVENTS**

The US Embassy American Citizen Services, Social Security Administration, and the VA Manila Regional Office and Outpatient Clinic are scheduled to participate in the following Outreach events. Regional Office staff will be available to assist with questions regarding pension and benefit claims, and Outpatient Clinic staff will be able to schedule appointments, provide wellness checkups, and will have pneumonia, and TDAP (Tetanus, Diphtheria, and Pertussis) vaccines available.

Angeles City, Pampanga - [PSA Angeles City Outreach](#) (US Embassy link)

Date: Thursday, January 16, 2020

Time: 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Venue: Clark Marriott Hotel

5400 Manuel Roxas Highway, Clark Freeport, Mabalacat, Pampanga

Olongapo City, Zambales- [PSA Olongapo City Outreach](#) (US Embassy link)

Date: Friday, January 17, 2020

Time: 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Venue: Mansion Garden Hotel

Dewey Avenue cor. Bonifacio St., Subic Bay Freeport, Olongapo City

Baguio City, Cordillera Administrative Region

Date: Thursday, January 30, 2020

Time: 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Venue: Baguio Ambassador's Residence - U.S. Embassy Compound

Loakan Road, Scout Hill, Camp John Hay, Baguio City

4. **PARKING UPDATES AT VA MANILA**

Pasay City and MMDA met in December with the US Embassy and indicated the timeline for completion of the Roxas Service Road Expansion is April 2020, barring any complications or construction delays. We remain hopeful that there will be a sufficient amount of space available at the completion of the project to re-establish the parking that was previously available to Veterans and Seafront Campus Visitors.

Additional updates will be provided monthly until the project's completion. VA Manila apologizes for this significant inconvenience.

FAQs regarding parking:

Q: Can Veterans park inside the US Embassy Compound?

A: Unfortunately, no. Access to the US Embassy compound is controlled by a strict access policy of the US Embassy and the US State Department, and we are not able to gain access to Veterans for the purpose of parking for their medical or regional office appointments. There is also limited parking currently available on the compound during working hours, and there is not enough space to accommodate all Veterans driving to their appointments. I understand many Veterans previously had access to the compound during their military service in the Philippines when there was a Commissary on site. However, as times have changed, access to the compound is now tightly limited to US Embassy Personnel.

Q: Can VA rent parking and operate a shuttle service to the Clinic?

A: Unfortunately, no. VA is not authorized to operate any type of Veterans Transportation Network (VTN) outside of the United States. It would also be exceedingly difficult to find a shuttle operator in the Philippines who could meet the mobility and access needs of disabled Veterans and meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). There are very few shuttle operators in Metro Manila who have wheelchair lifts and ramps available to accommodate our Veteran's medical and mobility needs.

Q: Can Veterans parallel park along the wall of the compound?

A: No. Vehicles are not permitted to parallel park on the grass adjacent to the Compound's security wall. Any vehicle parked adjacent to the wall would compromise the effectiveness of the wall.

Q: Where should I park now?

A: Veterans are strongly urged to use public transportation options (taxi, Grab, PUV) to travel to their medical appointments at this time. There are limited paid parking options approximately 300 meters north and south of the Clinic, adjacent to the Cuneta Astrodome and Japanese Embassy respectively. However, there are times when these parking areas are also unavailable. Veterans driving in from the rural parts of Luzon may find it easier to park at the Mall of Asia (₱50 charge) and take a Taxi or Grab from MOA to the Clinic (approximately a 5-10 minute journey). Veterans may also find it easier to have a driver who can drop them off and pick them up immediately in front of the VA entrance, and can stay with the vehicle while you are at your appointments in the VA.

5. **FOREIGN MEDICAL PROGRAM (FMP) UPDATES**

As a reminder to all Veterans using the FMP, providers who agree to bill VA on your behalf for Service-Connected Care may still collect from Veterans for any care provided that is not related to your service-connected conditions. For example, if you have a service-connected rating for a knee disability and are hospitalized for treatment on that knee, all services provided related to your service-connected condition will be reimbursed by the FMP. However, if you have non-service-connected diabetes, any diabetes treatment you receive while

you are hospitalized would be your responsibility and you should expect to be required to settle your portion of the bill in cash at the time services are provided.

A current list of FMP participating hospitals is below:

Divine Grace Medical Center	Cavite, Philippines
Manila Doctors Hospital	Manila, Philippines
Unihealth Baypointe Hospital	Olongapo, Philippines
Sacred Heart Medical Center	Angeles City, Philippines
The Medical City Clark	Angeles City, Philippines
The Medical City, Iloilo	Iloilo, Philippines
Avitus Kidney Care and Dialysis Center	Olongapo, Philippines
D&A Care – Physical Therapy	Metro Manila, Philippines
Manila Hearing Aid Company	14 locations
Asian Hospital Medical Center	Alabang, Philippines
Disclaimer: The list of participating hospitals is subject to change without notice and the VA is not responsible if the facility above chooses not to participate.	

The Medical Center in Ortigas has suspended billing FMP. This is due to billing practices and submission of incomplete information that result in FMP denying or being unable to process the claim. Currently the following facilities and FMP are working together to resolve the issue. In the meantime, Veterans must settle their bills in cash and request reimbursement from FMP.

6. **TIPS FOR FAST FMP REIMBURSEMENT**

- a. Email or fax your claim instead of mailing it. You will reduce processing time by at least two weeks.

Email: hac.fmp@va.gov

Fax number: 1-303-331-7803

b. Submit your claim in one complete package. A complete package includes:

- A completed VAF 10-7959F-2, Foreign Medical Program (FMP) Claim Cover Sheet.
 - Use a permanent address where mail will always reach you.

- Include a diagnosis or nature of illness or injury
 - Doctor's name and medical title
 - Doctor's office address
 - Doctor's office telephone number
 - Doctor's billing address if different from office address

- Include claim information – **ESPECIALLY** the Diagnosis Treated
 - Narrative Description of each service and/or drug (This determines if the condition is Service Connected)
 - Each service's billed charge
 - Date(s) of service.

Submitting an FMP claim without all the required information **WILL** be denied and you will have to resubmit.

7. **HOW CAN I HELP GET MORE HOSPITALS TO ACCEPT FMP?**

Contact your Veteran Organizations, Retired Activity Officers and Post Commanders to meet with hospital leadership in your community. Several hospitals on the current list are there because the RAO and Veterans organizations facilitated their participation

8. **PHARMACY MEDICATIONS OUT OF STOCK**

VA Manila, as the only VA facility located outside of the United States, occasionally has some unique challenges with receiving supplies and medications from our pharmacy distribution center in Hawaii. When a medication is out of stock at our primary vendor, VA Manila does not have an alternative source for medications. In these instances, Veterans will be required to obtain the medication through a local pharmacy in your community, and if the medication is for a service-connected condition, you are eligible to seek reimbursement through the Foreign Medical Program. We are actively monitoring this current list of out of stock medications, but want to ensure that Veterans are made aware, especially if you take one of these medications. Some of these medications are on a temporary, or short-term backorder; however, there are others which are categorized as long-term out of stock/backordered. As the pharmaceutical manufacturers have consolidated, there are fewer and fewer manufacturers producing pharmaceuticals in the United States. This continues to be a significant concern in the United States and VA Manila is doing everything we can to limit these instances here. You are always welcome to contact the Pharmacy directly at: +63 (02) 8550-3888, Option 2 for additional information regarding your medications.

VA Manila Out of Stock Medications, as of January 13, 2020.

LISINO+HCTZ20/12.5MG GOLD 1000
CYCLOBENZ TAB 10MG GOLD 1000
ARIFICL TEAR OPH SOL AKOR 15ML
TELMISARTAN/AMPLODIPINE 40/5MG
TELMISARTAN/AMPLODIPINE 40/10MG
TELMISARTAN/AMPLODIPINE 80/10MG
VALSARTAN 160MG

9. **EXPANDING USE OF MYHEALTHVET**

As we start the New Year, VA Manila is encouraging Veterans to make sure they are taking advantage of the functionality of MyHealthVet – especially Secure Messaging and access to Medical Records. VA Manila is actually one of the leaders across all of VA in Veteran use of MyHealthVet – particularly to ensure our enrolled Veterans can easily contact their providers and other clinical departments. Our Enrollment and Eligibility Team can assist Veterans with getting authenticated to use Secure Messaging. Please feel free to ask the staff at the front desk or your Medical Support Assistant at your next appointment.

10. **NEW VA MANILA REGIONAL OFFICE AND OUTPATIENT CLINIC TELEPHONE NUMBERS – EFFECTIVE OCT 6, 2019**

As part of the announced change by the Philippine Government to expand available telephone exchanges, all phone numbers in Metro Manila changed effective Sunday, October 6, 2019. **VA Manila's new main phone number will be: +63 (2) 8-550-3888.** This will connect you to the VA Manila's Phone System Switchboard, where you can use the following options:

Option 1 – Regional Office

Option 2 – Outpatient Clinic

Option 3 – Transfer to Veterans Evaluation Services (VES)

Option 4 – Transfer to the Foreign Medical Program's Hotline

Option 5 – Transfer to VBA Offices in the United States

Option 6 – Transfer to the VA MISSION Act Hotline

Option 7 – Transfer to the Veteran's Crisis Line

Option 8 – Transfer to VA Manila's AudioCare Line (Pharmacy Refills)

Other important direct dial numbers for the Outpatient Clinic with the new numbering system, include:

VA Manila Toll Free Phone:	+63 1 (800) 1888-5252 (unchanged) or #MyVA (#6982)
AudioCare (Pharmacy Refills):	+63 (2) 8-556-8387 No longer Available. Please use #MyVA, Option 8.
Clinical Fax (Medical Records):	+63 (2) 8-550-3964
Patient Advocate:	+63 (2) 8-396-3716
Clinic Manager:	+63 (2) 8-396-3735

Lastly – VA Manila is proud to announce that we have created a #Hashtag Phone Number that works with the primary telecommunications carriers in the Philippines, including PLDT, SUN/SMART, and Globe. From either a mobile or a landline on these carriers’ networks, you can now just dial **#MyVA (#6982)** – and it will automatically connect you to the VA Manila Switchboard.

11. **PLEASE DON’T NO-SHOW!!! REMINDER TO CANCEL APPOINTMENTS**

This serves as a friendly reminder to all Veterans who use the VA Manila Outpatient Clinic for their medical care, please cancel any appointments that you will not be able to keep. When Veterans do not cancel appointments, VA loses an opportunity to provide medical services to your fellow Veterans, decreases provider productivity, and requires additional administrative time from our staff to reschedule appointments. Ideally, we ask that Veterans notify the VA Outpatient Clinic at least 48 hours in advance of their appointment if you determine you have a scheduling conflict. This allows the Clinic’s Advanced Medical Support Assistants (AMSAs) to reach out to other Veterans waiting for care to offer them the new time slot. Our AMSAs typically reach out to all Veterans 72 hours before their appointments to confirm attendance. Additionally, the VA’s AudioCare reminder system makes telephone reminder calls between 24-48 hours before Veteran appointments.

Please be considerate to your fellow Veterans and do your part if you have a scheduled appointment that you won’t be able to keep. You can reach the clinic at +63 (2) 8550-3888, Option 2, or toll free at #MyVA (#6982) from any mobile phone.

12. COMPLETION OF VA AND NON-VA MEDICAL FORMS

VHA privacy and release of information policies and procedures are applied to releasing any VA or Non-VA Medical statements or medical forms completed on behalf of the Veteran.

- VA Providers can complete medical statements/forms with respect to a Veteran's medical condition and functionality, to the best of their ability based on their scope, clinical expertise and available historical evidence.
- Complete a VA Form 10-5345 and leave it together with the medical statement/form you want completed with the Office of Release of Information. Here is a link to the form on VA's webpage: <https://www.va.gov/vaforms/medical/pdf/10-5345.pdf>.
- Expect a VA Manila response within 20 working days.

Veterans requesting assistance with submitting a VA disability benefits claim should access the VBA Internet website at <http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation> or call +63 (02) 8550-3888 and press 1 for additional assistance or check in at the VBA Reception Desk

13. VA MANILA CLINIC HOURS OF OPERATION

Important Announcement: See Unscheduled Appointments (Walk-ins)

- **SCHEDULED LABORATORY APPOINTMENTS** – 7:30 am to 2:00 pm, Monday - Friday. Scheduled Veterans may enter the facility at 7:00 am and check in for their laboratory appointments. Veterans who are scheduled for early morning appointments (8:00 am or 8:30 am) are called to the laboratory first to ensure they are not delayed for their early morning appointments.

- **SCHEDULED CLINIC APPOINTMENTS** – 8:00 am to 3:30 pm, Monday - Friday. Scheduled Veterans are called by their appointment time not when they arrive.
- **UNSCHEDULED APPOINTMENTS (WALK-INS)** - 8:00 am to 1:00 pm, Monday – Friday. Walk-in Veterans are triaged to determine the purpose of their visit. If it is determined by a nurse that a physician appointment is necessary, the Veteran will be seen by their primary care doctor if there is an appointment cancellation otherwise they will be seen by another physician.
- **No walk-in Veteran is permitted entry into the facility after 1:00 pm.** This is to ensure all scheduled Veterans are treated and/or their business is completed before the close of business. Please be respectful of your fellow Veterans and not ask staff to make an exception for you. Enforcing the 1:00 pm walk-in curfew ensures scheduled Veterans can complete tests/appointments and finish timely, before the Clinic closes.

If the Veteran is experiencing a medical emergency, they should go to the nearest emergency room. VA Manila does not provide emergent services.

14. **PLANNING TO TRAVEL TO THE UNITED STATES?**

Veterans planning to travel to the United States and want to continue medical treatment should call the clinic's Traveling Veteran Coordinator at +63 (2) 8550-3888, press 2. Our TVC can facilitate your care with her counterpart in the United States. Your Primary Care will recommend coordination when needed care with an alternate VA facility near you is required. Please allow 4 to 6 weeks lead time to ensure appointments are prearranged upon your arrival.

15. **VETERANS CRISIS LINE**

The Veterans Crisis Line connects Veterans in crisis and their families and friends with qualified and caring Department of Veteran Affairs responders through a confidential toll-free hotline, online chat or text. Veterans and their loved ones can call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1. To learn more about the Veterans Crisis Line or to chat online, go to <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/> and click on the appropriate link.

16. **NO VALID GOVERNMENT ID/NO ENTRY/NO EXCEPTIONS:**

The U.S. Embassy Regional Security Office no longer permit employees, Veterans, attendants, and family members to enter a U.S. Embassy facility to include the VA Manila Regional Office and Outpatient Clinic without a valid government picture ID. Family members and attendants over the age of 14 will also need to provide a valid government ID.

17. **COMPUTER LAPTOPS PROHIBITED:**

The U.S. Embassy, including VA Manila, no longer permits Veterans, attendants and family members to enter a U.S. Embassy facility with a computer laptop. Do not bring any large electronic device as the U.S. Embassy guards nor VA staff are permitted to accept or store the device.

OTHER PROHIBITED ITEMS:

Visitors, attendants and family members are prohibited from bringing into a U.S. Embassy facility, including VA Manila, weapons of any kind to include pocket knives, cameras, recording devices, and large electronic devices. Veterans, attendants, family members and visitors are prohibited from taking photos inside the facility and are prohibited from leaving their personal belongings in the reception lobby.