



**Department of  
Veterans Affairs**

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# **News Release**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## **VA Offers Care, Support to Gulf Coast Vets in Advance of Gustav *Facilities Preparing for Post-Landfall Operations***

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is working closely with other federal and local agencies to protect patients, staff and operational capability as the Gulf Coast region prepares for Hurricane Gustav, which is expected to make landfall along the coast near the Texas-Louisiana border sometime Monday.

VA health care facilities throughout the region are moving hospitalized and special needs patients, stocking supplies and preparing to continue operations, whenever possible, during the storm and the recovery period, including the pre-positioning of staff, equipment and supplies in Baton Rouge.

“The health care needs of Gulf Coast veterans don’t disappear during the hurricane season,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. “We’re resolved to continue providing veterans with services whenever possible, and reconstituting services as quickly as possible when they have had to be curtailed because of the storm.”

VA medical centers and clinics near the affected area are prepared to absorb any extra patients and will contact their regular patients to reschedule appointments if necessary.

Veterans who receive monthly compensation for disabilities, education, pension or other benefits will continue to receive regularly scheduled payments. VA national cemeteries in the affected areas have activated their emergency response plans and are standing by to reschedule burials if necessary.

VA health care officials in the region are advising patients to come in for urgent care. Veterans who need prescription refills are advised to call in their requests, rather than travel to a VA health care facility.

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## **Gustav Preparations 2/2/2/2**

“Veterans in the affected area who need emergency medical care should considering going to the nearest civilian facility, if they would risk their health by traveling to a VA hospital or clinic,” Peake said.

To protect the safety of patients and staff, VA officials have announced the following clinic closure several high-risk facilities through Tuesday, Sept. 2:

- Downtown New Orleans, La., clinic;
- Slidell, La., clinic;
- St. John Parish clinic;
- Houma, La., clinic;
- Mandeville dental clinic;
- Lafayette, La., clinic (closed Tuesday and Wednesday);
- Jennings clinic (closed Tuesday and Wednesday); and
- Beaumont, Texas, clinic (closed until the city’s emergency evacuation order is lifted).

VA has moved New Orleans staff to the Baton Rouge area to ensure continued operations of enhanced capabilities at the Baton Rouge clinic.

Current information on the operation of Gulf Coast VA facilities is available at [www.neworleans.va.gov](http://www.neworleans.va.gov).

VA employees are asked to use the VA Emergency Employee Assistance Call Center to provide their status and receive current information regarding evacuation pay and overtime. The call center number is 1-866-233-0152.

Secretary Peake strongly encouraged veterans and employees in Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas to make emergency preparations in anticipation of Hurricane Gustav’s expected landfall. They should make an emergency kit, have an emergency plan in place, follow the instructions of local authorities and prepare for additional emergency measures that may be necessary. Tips on preparing for, surviving and recovering from a hurricane are listed at [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov), individual state emergency preparedness websites as well as the American Red Cross.

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## **Gustav Preparations 3/3/3/3**

Beginning as early as Aug. 26, numerous VA and other federal agencies began placing resources and personnel in the region. VA has taken these precautionary steps:

- Southern Louisiana Healthcare System has evacuated at-risk patients;
- VA has begun staffing a Federal Medical Station at Rushton, La.;
- Little Rock, Oklahoma City and Dallas VA Federal Coordinating Centers have been activated and are already receiving National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) patients;
- Seven additional VA Federal Coordinating Centers remain on alert for NDMS activation;
- Activated two toll-free, 1-800 numbers for patient and employee assistance;
- Moving New Orleans staff to Baton Rouge; and
- Moved 12 support vehicles to Baton Rouge, the back-up site for New Orleans.

VA will announce the reopening of the affected clinics plus any other closings or changes in operations.

In addition, VA is simultaneously monitoring Tropical Storm Hanna in anticipation of potential landfall along the southeastern seaboard.

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