

Healthy Living Message

Be Safe

This information is for clinical staff to share with the Veteran.

Key Message to Veterans: There are actions you can take to protect yourself and those you love from harm. Common safety issues are sexually transmitted infections, falls, and motor vehicle crashes.

Expanded Message to Veterans:

Prevent Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs):

- The best way to fully protect yourself from STIs is to abstain from sex.
- STIs can be passed to another person during sex; therefore, use a latex condom every time you have sex (vaginal, anal, or oral), if your partner might be or is infected.
- Decreasing the number of your sexual partners may reduce your risk of developing STIs.
- Being in a mutually monogamous relationship with an uninfected partner (you and your partner only have sex with each other) can reduce your risk of developing STIs.
- STIs can also be passed from a pregnant woman to her baby before or during the baby's birth.
- If you are pregnant, get tested for STIs and seek appropriate treatment if the test is positive to avoid passing the infection to the baby.
- Many STIs do not have symptoms. You can have an STI without knowing it. If you think you might have an STI or have been exposed, talk to your health care provider.
- Some STIs can be cured with antibiotics if they are treated early. Untreated STIs can cause serious health problems, such as infertility.
- If you are treated for an STI, your sex partner(s) should also be treated to prevent re-infecting you.

Prevent Falls:

- Among older adults, falls are the leading cause of injury deaths. They are also the most common cause of nonfatal injuries and hospital admissions for trauma (CDC 2005).
- About half of all falls happen at home.
- If you or a loved one has fallen recently or has balance problems, consider the following home safety tips and request a home safety assessment, if available to you:



- Remove small throw rugs or use double-sided tape to keep the rugs from slipping.
- Have grab bars put in next to your toilet and in the tub or shower.
- Improve the lighting in your home. As you get older, you need brighter lights to see well. Hang light-weight curtains or shades to reduce glare.
- Wear shoes both inside and outside the house. Avoid going barefoot or wearing slippers.
- Remove things you can trip over (such as papers, books, clothes, shoes) from stairs and places where you walk.
- Keep items you use often in cabinets you can reach easily without using a step stool.
- Use non-slip mats in the bathtub and on shower floors.
- Have handrails and lights put in all staircases.
- Engaging in regular physical activity, especially strength exercises may reduce your risk of falling by increasing strength and balance.

Prevent Motor Vehicle Crashes and Injury:

- Impaired driving is dangerous and causes more than half of all motor vehicle crashes. Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death in Veterans in the early years after returning from deployment. Don't drive while under the influence of alcohol or drugs or ride with somebody who is.
- You can reduce your chance and your loved ones' chances of dying from a motor vehicle-related injury by correctly using seat belts and car seats. Wear seat belts in cars and helmets on motorcycles and bicycles.
- Don't text message or talk on a cell phone while driving.

Message Delivery by Clinical Staff:

During Face to Face Encounters:

- Education alone is not a proven effective method for behavior change so use health coaching techniques.
- Provide or refer for intensive behavioral counseling for persons at high-risk for sexually transmitted infections.
- Consider referring patient and/or family member to provider for discussion regarding driving capability or performance, especially in older individuals. This is especially important if the Veteran has a medical or mental health condition that may impair attention, concentration or coordination.
- Discuss and review results of the VHA online Health Risk Assessment (under development) during a clinical visit.

At the Facility Level:

- Consider participation in facility-wide campaigns in conjunction with local public health interventions.



- Post-deployment clinics: Consider discussing evasive driving habits used in combat zone being used inappropriately if Veteran recently returned from deployment.

Important Considerations:

If a Veteran needs more intensive intervention in this area than the clinical staff member delivering the message is able to provide, the staff member should refer the Veteran to the appropriate clinical staff, clinic or program for further education or clinical care, following local referral/consult protocol.

Clinical Staff Tools: *(Staff may also benefit by reviewing the Veteran Tools listed in the next section).*

STIs:

- CDC STI Program Tools: <http://www.cdc.gov/std/general/> *
- Clinical management of HIV: <http://www.hiv.va.gov/vahiv?page=cm-04-00>

Falls:

- Risk questions for falls:
http://www.patientsafety.gov/SafetyTopics/fallstoolkit/media/at_risk.pdf*
- Patient Handout for falls prevention:
<http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Falls/WhatYouCanDoToPreventFalls.html> *

Motor Vehicle Safety:

- Older Drivers: [Physician's Guide to Assessing and Counseling Older Drivers](#)*
- [How to Understand and Influence Older Drivers](#)*
- Traffic Safety Materials Catalog: from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/outreach/media/catalog/topic.cfm?cfid=1111089&cfoken=57247723> *

Veteran Tools:

STIs:

- Proper use of condoms: http://www.ashastd.org/condom/condom_overview.cfm
*American Social Health Association
- HIV: <http://www.hiv.va.gov/>
- Healthfinder: Get Tested
<http://www.healthfinder.gov/prevention/ViewTopic.aspx?topicID=32&cnt=1&arealD=0>*

Falls:

- What You Can Do to Prevent Falls:
<http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/pubs/English/brochureEngdesktop-a.pdf> *



- http://www.patientsafety.gov/SafetyTopics/fallstoolkit/media/fall_prevention_at_home.pdf*
- Healthfinder: Lower Your Risk of Falling
<http://www.healthfinder.gov/prevention/ViewTopic.aspx?topicID=17>*

Motor Vehicle Safety:

- Safe Driving Initiative Brochure
http://www.safedriving.va.gov/docs/safe_driving_brochure.pdf
- Other driving resources: <http://www.safedriving.va.gov/resources/driving.asp>
- Questions and Answers on distracted driving: <http://www.distraction.gov/faq/>*

* Indicates that the link leads to a non-VA website. The VA is not responsible for the content that is on the site.

Supporting Information:

Definitions:

- Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs): Infections acquired by having sex with someone who has an STI. STIs can result from any sexual activity, whether it involves the mouth, anus, vagina, or penis.
- Increased risk/high risk for STIs: People are at increased risk for STIs if they have multiple current sexual partners, are sexually active adolescents, or have had an STI within the past year.

Evidence and/or Guidelines:

Sexually Transmitted Infections:

- The US Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends high intensity behavioral counseling to prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs) for all sexually active adolescents and for adults at increased risk for STIs. It concludes that the evidence is insufficient to assess the balance of benefits and harms of behavioral counseling to prevent STIs in non-sexually-active adolescents and in adults not at increased risk for STIs. Little evidence suggests that single-session interventions or interventions lasting less than 30 minutes were effective in reducing STIs.

Prevent Falls:

- More than one third of adults 65 and older fall each year in the United States (Hornbrook et al. 1994; Hausdorff et al. 2001).
- In 2005, 15,800 people 65 and older died from injuries related to unintentional falls; about 1.8 million people 65 and older were treated in emergency departments for nonfatal injuries from falls, and more than 433,000 of these patients were hospitalized (CDC 2005).
- The rates of fall-related deaths among older adults rose significantly over the past decade (Stevens 2006).

Motor Vehicle Safety:



- The USPSTF has determined that the evidence is insufficient to assess the incremental benefit, beyond the efficacy of legislation and community-based interventions, of counseling in the primary care setting, in improving rates of proper use of motor vehicle occupant restraints. The USPSTF has also determined that the evidence is insufficient to assess the balance of benefits and harms of routine counseling of all patients in the primary care setting to reduce driving while under the influence of alcohol or riding with driver who are alcohol-impaired.
- Legislation has the most effect on decreasing injuries and death from motor vehicle crashes, whether by restraint laws or impaired driving laws. Community campaigns to raise awareness show some success.¹⁻¹³

VHA Guidance:

- STIs: Testing for Human Immunodeficiency in VHA Facilities:
http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=2056none
- FY 2010 performance measure for falls: Outpatient - Documentation of basic fall history in the last 12 months, Outpatient - Provider note detailing results of basic fall evaluation & document action taken, Falls assessment for inpatients
- 2010 Joint Commission National Patient Safety Goal: Goal 9 – Reduce the risk of patient harm resulting from falls.
- Safe Driving Initiative <http://www.safedriving.va.gov/>

VHA Program Office Stakeholders:

- Primary Care Services
- Care Management and Social Work Services
- Geriatrics and Extended Care Services
- Office of Mental Health Services
- Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards
- Women Veterans Health Strategic Health Care Group
- Public Health Strategic Health Care Group
- Office of Nursing Service
- VA National Center for Patient Safety
- National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention

VHA Content Experts:

- VA National Center for Patient Safety
- Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards
- Geriatrics and Extended Care Services
- National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention



Source Documents:

1. Home and Recreational Safety website.
http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/pubs/English/brochure_Eng_de_sktop-a.pdf
2. Hornbrook MC, Stevens VJ, Wingfield DJ, Hollis JF, Greenlick MR, Ory MG. Preventing falls among community-dwelling older persons: results from a randomized trial. *Gerontologist*. Feb 1994;34(1):16-23.
3. U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality website. 2009;
<http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf/uspstfstds.htm>*
4. HHS. Healthfinder: A Quick Guide to Reliable Information on Healthy Eating and Other Topics. <http://www.healthfinder.gov>.
5. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) - Integrating Evidence-Based Clinical and COmmunity Strategies to Improve Health.
<http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/uspstf07/methods/tfmethods.htm>.
6. How to Use I Statements in Clinical Practice (VIDEO).
<http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/ivideos.htm>.
7. The Guide to Community Preventive Services
<http://www.thecommunityguide.org/index.html>.
8. Sexually transmitted infections website
<http://www.healthfinder.gov/prevention/ViewTopic.aspx?topicID=32&areaID=5>.
9. Prevent falls website
<http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Falls/adultfalls.html>.
10. Fatalities and injuries from falls among older adults--United States, 1993-2003 and 2001-2005. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep*. Nov 17 2006;55(45):1221-1224.
11. Administration on Aging website. <http://www.aoa.gov/>.
12. CDC National Center for Injury Prevention: A Toolkit to Prevent Senior Falls.
<http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/falls/index.html>.
13. Motor Vehicle Safety website.
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/motorvehiclesafety.html>*
<http://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/index.html>.

