

In-person clinic visits at VA down by half early in pandemic

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(HealthDay)—During the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a 56

percent decline in in-person visits across Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) outpatient facilities, which is only partly offset by more than a twofold increase in the number of telephone and video visits, according to a research letter published online Aug. 10 in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

Aaron Baum, Ph.D., from the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai and VA New York Harbor Healthcare System in New York City, and colleagues used [electronic health records](#) in the VA Corporate Data Warehouse to assess changes in the number of in-person, [telephone](#), and video visits at U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs outpatient facilities during the initial weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic. Patient encounters were compared between the first 20 weeks of 2016 to 2019 and the first 20 weeks of 2020.

The researchers found that the number of in-person visits to a VA outpatient facility decreased from 18,898,656 in weeks 1 to 10 of 2020 to 8,408,268 in weeks 11 to 20, a 55 percent reduction. During the same period, the number of telephone visits increased 139 percent from 2,539,685 to 6,070,362, while the number of video visits increased 72.6 percent from 425,495 to 734,547. The combined total number of VA outpatient in-person and telehealth visits decreased 30.4 percent in weeks 11 to 20. Decreases in in-person visits and increases in telehealth visits occurred across 92.8 percent of VA clinics. The researchers found no difference in the [number](#) of in-person, telephone, video, or overall outpatient visits between weeks 1 to 10 and 11 to 20 of 2016 to 2019.

"Further research is needed to understand how decreased access to in-person care and increased use of telehealth services during the pandemic may affect patient outcomes," the authors write.

More information: [Abstract/Full Text](#)

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