

American Red Cross

Service to the Armed Forces Program (SAF)

What is SAF?

Service to the Armed Forces (SAF) is a division of the American Red Cross dedicated to serving the men and women of our U.S. Armed Forces, veterans and their families. The Red Cross provides social services to the families of military members; supports military and veterans health care facilities; and keeps military families connected during times of crisis through our emergency communications network.

What services does SAF provide?

The American Red Cross provides a wide range of services that support members of the military, families and veterans in the U.S. and across the world:

- SAF staff and volunteers serve in military hospitals and clinics around the world and in VA medical facilities across the nation. Red Cross SAF volunteers work in libraries, bringing magazines, books, and comfort items to patients, provide companionship and personal services to patients, manage volunteer programs, and participate in outreach opportunities in community-based outpatient clinics, nursing homes and home visitations.
- We assist loved ones with the challenges associated with being a military family by ensuring those families needing help are connected to their communities through a robust information and referral network of social service options. We also make sure a military family is able to be at the side of their wounded warrior in the event they can't afford it. The Red Cross also provides a course (Coping with Deployments: Psychological First Aid for Military Families) that helps military families deal with the every day stressors while their loved one is deployed overseas.
- The Red Cross ensures that service members and their families stay in touch with each other; especially during a crisis. In the early days of the Red Cross, volunteers helped wounded soldiers write letters home. Today, in the age of cell phones and email, the Red Cross Emergency Communication Network is vital to service members, their families and commanders in the field. Military commanders know in times of family crisis, they can rely on the Red Cross to verify and quickly relay important and confidential information to military personnel.

What do Red Cross volunteers do in military and VA medical facilities?

Red Cross staff and volunteers in military and VA medical facilities support the recovery and rehabilitation of service members as they prepare for their return to duty or transition to civilian life. Services may include transporting patients to and from treatment sessions, making referrals to community resources, assisting with nursing duties, providing office support, delivering books and magazines, writing letters, making phone calls, running errands, or just visiting with patients and their families. The Red Cross is with wounded, ill, or injured service members and veterans every step of the way. We start with their hospital stay and continue through their rehabilitation and until they return to military service or are transitioned to civilian life.

How does SAF help military families?

The Red Cross works to relieve the stress and anxiety of military families that may occur during times of crisis or during a deployment. As a part of our Emergency Communication Program, deployed Red Cross staff delivers round-the-clock emergency messages between military personnel and their loved ones at home.

The Red Cross information and referral network provides information for families that find themselves in a crisis situation and needing help. In addition, Red Cross staffers on military installations offer Health and Safety training courses such as CPR, First Aid, and Water Safety, Healthy Pregnancy-Healthy Baby and Babysitting training to service members and their families. Red Crossers also offer training to help community members prepare for and respond to disasters, and provide emergency assistance during times of crisis.

How can deployed members of the military access SAF services?

It is important for military families to know that the American Red Cross has personnel at work on military installations around the world and alongside deployed troops in Afghanistan, Kuwait, and Iraq. In our deployed locations, the Red Cross operates a lounge where troops can come and relax, use Internet cafés equipped with computer stations and webcams, and utilize canteen services offering beverages, snacks, personal hygiene items, and calling cards. Some locations have a morale phone bank that can be used to call home.

What do Emergency Communications entail?

Red Cross Emergency Communication Messages relay verified information about emergency situations involving service members and their immediate families. These messages provide information to service members, their families, and to their military leaders about urgent and time-sensitive situations. These could include a serious illness, a life-threatening situation involving immediate family, a death, as well as the good news of the birth of a service member's child. Emergency Communication Messages are independently verified reports that enable service members and their commanders to make informed decisions about leave and other matters in order to prevent, prepare for, and respond to a family emergency.

Who can initiate an Emergency Communication message?

While requests for Emergency Communication Messages may be initiated by anyone, most requests for assistance come from someone of the service member's family.

How much does the Red Cross charge for Emergency Communication?

There is no charge for Red Cross Emergency Communication services.

How does the Red Cross verify the information in an Emergency Communication?

The assigned Red Cross SAF caseworker contacts the appropriate licensed authority with specific knowledge of the situation to ascertain the details. The caseworker annotates the case file and informs the concerned parties. An example of a licensed authority may include a physician, a coroner, funeral home director or even a law enforcement official.

In a world full of email and cell phones, why is this service necessary?

The American Red Cross is a trusted, neutral and objective third party. This means that we verify information and pass on the facts so the military commander can relay it to the affected service member and make an informed decision on granting emergency leave. We also do it very quickly. There are numerous occasions when it is extremely difficult for a family to make contact with their deployed service member. The service member may be on a mission; working unusual hours; may not have access to a phone or computer for email. When a family emergency occurs and the service member needs immediate notification; families can turn to the American Red Cross knowing they will receive prompt, thorough and professional service. This fast and reliable service is counted on hundreds of times every day by military families, deployed service members, and field commanders around the world.

How can people get help from the Red Cross and Service to Armed Forces?

People can get help from Red Cross SAF programs in four different ways:

- Contacting the local Red Cross chapter.
- Contacting the Red Cross Station office located on the local military installation.
- Going online to www.redcross.org
- And in the case of an emergency, people can 800-REDCROSS and press #2.

How do National Guard members get help from the Red Cross SAF services?

The best way to get help is to contact the local Red Cross chapter or call 800-RED-CROSS.

What should families who are stationed overseas do to access Red Cross services?

The best way for families to access Red Cross services is by making contact with the Red Cross Station office on the installation to which the service member is assigned.

Can the Red Cross help if a loved one has been injured and is being brought back to the U.S. for treatment when families do not have money to get to their bedside?

Yes, the Red Cross can provide assistance. The Red Cross Casualty Travel Assistance Program (CTAP) helps the families of service members killed or injured in the CENTCOM Area of Responsibility (primarily, Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan). Money from this program can be used to help up to two immediate family members travel to the funeral or memorial service of a service member. In addition, when there is a medical need for family to travel to the bedside of an injured service member hospitalized in CONUS or a U.S. territory, the Red Cross will assist when the military has declined to issue Invitational Travel Orders. Because CTAP is a community program carried out by chapters, people can contact their local Red Cross chapter or call 800-RED-CROSS.

Does the Red Cross assist family members who cannot afford to travel to the funeral of a loved one killed while deployed?

Yes, the Red Cross provides help in these situations through the Casualty Travel Assistance Program. People can contact their local Red Cross chapter or call 800-RED-CROSS.

What does the Red Cross do to help families struggling after a deployment of a service member to the Middle East or another post?

As the nation's military and their families deal with the demands of increased deployments and increased reliance on National Guard and Reservists, the Red Cross is offering the Coping with Deployment Psychological First Aid, a course designed specifically to assist military family members to help them prepare for and cope with deployments.

This course was developed for families of service members, including spouses, older children, parents, siblings and significant others to address the challenges that may arise during a loved one's deployment. This course provides sound techniques and coping tools to help families before, during and after deployment.

Can the Red Cross authorize a military member to come home in case of a family emergency?

No, the American Red Cross cannot "authorize" anyone to be released from their military duties to come home for a family emergency. Through the use of our Emergency Communications Network, the Red Cross can provide vital qualified information for commanders to make a clear decision to grant the service member to emergency leave or not.

What assistance does SAF offer to veterans?

Assisting veterans of the U.S. military is part of the American Red Cross mission. The Red Cross helps veterans and their family members through its local chapters and through the Board of Veterans Appeals.

Red Cross chapters assist veterans with information and referral for local and national resources, as well as through volunteer service in local Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities through the national VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) program. Red Cross volunteers in VA medical facilities provide patient transport, pet visitation, administrative support, personal services (reading, making phone calls, running errands, feeding), reception, Veterans Oral History project, youth volunteer, event planner and professional medical volunteers.

Through the Board of Veterans Appeals, the Red Cross provides veterans with assistance with appeals claims. This is a free service, and our representative at the VA assists in 200-300 claims each year.

Military personnel say they have seen a big red cross on the side of a helicopter while stationed overseas; does the Red Cross fly emergency aircraft in combat zones? The Red Cross is not a military or medical organization, and does not fly aircraft or drive emergency vehicles in war zones. The American Red Cross has staff that is deployed alongside our military that operate centers where troops can come and relax, use Internet cafés equipped with computer stations and webcams, and utilize canteen services offering beverages, snacks, personal hygiene items, calling cards. Some locations operate a morale phone bank.

How can people volunteer to work with military families?

The American Red Cross is always looking for volunteers and nowhere is there more need than when it comes to assisting military members and their families. The best place to start is by contacting the local Red Cross chapter, find out which SAF programs are being offered, and get involved.

Information about local Red Cross Chapters can be found online on www.redcross.org under Contact Your Local Chapter.

What can families members do if they have not heard from their service member who has been deployed to a combat area?

Family members may contact their local chapter or call 800-RED-CROSS for guidance on how to contact their military member.

Are there volunteer opportunities to work with military members in war zone?

Red Cross staff who deploy with the military are either regular paid staff or SAF Reservists. Reservists are short-term employees who are hired specifically to deploy. If you are interested in deploying as staff or as an SAF Reservist, please go online to www.redcross.org and check the jobs section for next available opportunities.

How old do you need to be to volunteer with the Red Cross in military hospitals, veterans hospitals or on military installations?

There are no age limits for people to volunteer in military or veterans medical facilities. Volunteers are assigned age appropriate tasks in accordance with the specific guidelines

at the medical facility. A five year old piano prodigy could be a Red Cross volunteer and perform for service members and veterans; while an adult may be assigned the task to visit patients in the hospital rooms or serve in one of the clinics. There are volunteers of all ages in our hospital programs, including many youth volunteers.

Do volunteers need to be CPR/1st Aid certified to work with military and veterans?

Being trained in CPR and First Aid is time well spent. There are some SAF volunteer opportunities that do not require CPR and First Aid training. And there are some SAF volunteer jobs at military and VA medical facilities that may have more extensive requirements. Please check with your local Red Cross chapter.

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