

Gulf War Review

Information for Veterans Who Served in Desert Shield/Storm and Their Families

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<http://www.va.gov/GulfWar>

Peake Sworn in as VA Secretary

New Leader Pledges to Look to the Future

In a December 20, 2007, ceremony, Dr. James B. Peake, a combat veteran of the Vietnam War and former Army Surgeon General, was sworn in by President George W. Bush as the Nation's sixth Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

"Dr. Peake takes office at a critical moment in the history of this Department," said President Bush. "Our Nation is at war – and many new veterans are leaving the battlefield and entering the VA system. This system provides our veterans with the finest care."

Secretary Peake stressed his commitment to easing the transition of our current generation of returning combat-experienced men and women and of "the opportunity to look to the future of this newest generation of combat veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan – getting it right for them and for their families."

Peake, who retired in 2004 as a three-star general, is a board-certified thoracic surgeon. His commands included the U.S. Army Medical Command, headquartered at Ft. Sam Houston, Texas; Madigan Army Medical Center in Tacoma, Wash.; the 44th Medical Brigade at Fort Bragg, N.C.; and the 18th Medical Command in Seoul, South Korea.

Secretary Peake told those assembled, "You need to know that I believe deeply in the mission, and that I believe in you. I know quite a number of you already. I've seen the ethic, the caring, the compassion, and the technical skills."

A native of St. Louis and graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Peake attended medical school after serving in Vietnam, where he earned the Silver Star and Purple Heart.

As Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Peake assumes leadership of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the second largest Cabinet department, with about 250,000 employees and a budget last year exceeding \$82 billion.

Five Years of VA Health Care for Combat Veterans

Peake: Honoring Commitment to Newest Combat Veterans

Military veterans who served in combat since November 11, 1998, including veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, are now eligible for enhanced enrollment opportunities that provide cost-free medical care from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for conditions potentially related to service in the theater of combat operations for their five-year post-discharge period. This measure increases a two-year limit that has been in effect for nearly a decade.

“By their service and their sacrifice, America’s newest combat veterans have earned this special eligibility period for VA’s world-class health care,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake.

The five-year post-discharge period has no effect upon veterans with medical conditions VA determines are related to their military service. Veterans may apply at any time after their discharge from the military — even decades later — for medical care for service-connected health problems.

The new provision, part of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2008 signed by President Bush on January 28, 2008, applies to care in a VA hospital, outpatient clinic or nursing home. It also extends the application period for VA dental benefits, for veterans who were not provided necessary dental care prior to their discharges — previously limited to 90 days after discharge for most veterans — to 180 days.

Combat veterans who were discharged between November 11, 1998, and January 16, 2003, and who never enrolled in VA’s health care system may apply for this enhanced enrollment opportunity through January 27, 2011.

This five-year post-discharge period is also open to activated Reservists and members of the National Guard if they served in a theater of combat operations after November 11, 1998, and were discharged under other than dishonorable conditions.

Veterans who take advantage of this five-year post-discharge period to receive VA health care will continue to receive care after five years although certain veterans may have to pay copayments for medical problems unrelated to their military service. Copayments currently range from \$8 for a 30-day supply of prescription medicine to \$1,024 for the first 90 days of inpatient care each year. For additional information, please call toll-free 1-877-222-VETS (8387), or visit us online at <http://www.va.gov/healtheligibility>.

Have You Had Your Gulf War Registry Health Examination?

If you are a veteran who served on active military duty in Southwest Asia during the Gulf War, which began in 1990 and continues to the present, including Operation Iraqi Freedom, you are eligible for a Gulf War Registry Examination. This includes service in one of the following areas:

- Iraq
- The Neutral Zone (between Iraq and Saudi Arabia)
- Saudi Arabia
- Kuwait
- Qatar
- Oman
- The United Arab Emirates
- Gulf of Oman
- Gulf of Aden
- Waters of the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea and Red Sea.

A health registry examination is a personalized and comprehensive examination that includes blood work, urinalysis, and, where medically indicated, a chest x-ray and EKG.

Following the examination, the results of the physical examination and laboratory tests are provided to the veteran both face-to-face and in a follow-up letter. Also, the results of this examination are maintained in the veteran's medical record.

This examination is available to all eligible veterans with no co-payment requirement. This health registry examination provides an opportunity to enroll in the VA health care system. However, veterans do not have to enroll to receive this registry examination. Veterans also automatically receive or have access to VA's newsletters with updates or special information on health care and other benefits for them.

The demographic information (personal details), exposures, reported symptoms, and diagnoses are all maintained in a computerized index or list of veterans located at the Corporate Franchise Data (CFD) Center (formerly Austin Automation Center (AAC) in Austin, TX). *Note: A Gulf War Health Registry Examination is not a claim, nor is it required, for VA benefits or compensation.*

Depleted Uranium (DU)

In addition to the Gulf War Health Registry Examination, if you have been identified as having possible Depleted Uranium (DU) exposure during your military service in the Gulf War, or you have concerns about potential exposure to DU, you may request a DU evaluation. This evaluation involves urine testing.

The following Web link provides veterans with information on registries and related topics: <http://www.va.gov/EnvironAgents>.

VA provides several hotlines and contact numbers for veterans covering the Gulf War Health Registry Programs and other topics:

VA's national toll-free telephone number, staffed by veterans service representatives, provides information about disability compensation benefits, as well as vocational

rehabilitation and education programs available to veterans: **1-800-827-1000**. The Special Health Issues Helpline is also a source of valuable information: **1-800-749-8387**.

For VA Health Eligibility/Enrollment: **1-877-222-8387**.

Gulf War Research Advisory Committee Update 2007: Annual Report Recommends Gulf War Advisory Committee

The Research Advisory Committee (RAC) on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses was created by Congress in 1998, and first appointed by Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi in January, 2002. The mission of the Committee is to make recommendations to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on government research relating to the health consequences of military service in the Southwest Asia theater of operations during the 1991 Gulf War. According to its charter, the guiding principle for the work of the Committee shall be the premise that the fundamental goal of Gulf War-related government research is to improve the health of ill Gulf War veterans. Research priorities will be judged against this standard.

In a letter to former Secretary Nicholson dated February 1, 2007, the Gulf War Research Advisory Committee recommended that VA create a separate advisory body to review and advise on clinical care and benefits issues affecting Gulf War veterans. These are issues that are outside the charter of the Gulf War Research Advisory Committee (<http://www.va.gov/RAC-GWVI/>).

Secretary Peake announced the establishment of the new Gulf War Veterans Advisory Committee in February 2008. The committee will advise the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on the full spectrum of health care treatments, benefits delivery, and related issues that confront veterans who served exclusively in the Southwest Asia theater of operations during the 1990 - 1991 Gulf War. The Task Force will focus on advising the Secretary on the needs that are unique to these veterans and how these might best be addressed by VA.

How to Apply for Disability Compensation from VA

Like other veterans, Gulf War veterans with service connected illnesses or injuries are eligible for monthly payments called disability compensation. The disability must have been incurred or aggravated during active military service. Furthermore, the military service of the veteran must have been terminated through separation or discharge under conditions that were other than dishonorable.

Disability compensation varies according to the degree of disability and the number of dependents. Benefits are not subject to Federal or state income tax. Receipt of military retirement pay, disability severance pay, and separation incentive payments, known as SSB and VSI (Special Separation Benefits and Voluntary Separation Incentives), effects the amount of VA compensation paid.

Disability Ratings Ranges

Disability ratings range from 0 to 100 percent (in increments of 10 percent). For example, in 2008, a veteran with a disability rating of 10 percent receives \$117 per month; a veteran with disability rating of 50 percent gets \$728 per month; and a veteran with no dependents who is totally disabled and evaluated at 100 percent receives \$2,527 monthly. Veterans with disability ratings between 30 and 100 percent also are eligible for monthly allowances for each dependent. (The amount depends on the disability rating.)

Additional Disability Benefits

A veteran who either is in need of regular aid and attendance of another person (including the veteran's spouse), or who is permanently housebound may be entitled to additional benefits. VA must make that determination before the veteran can get these benefits.

Other Benefits

In addition to the compensation program described above, individual veterans may be eligible for the full range of other benefits offered by VA, including education and training, vocational rehabilitation, home loan guaranties, life insurance, pension, burial benefits, and more.

New Disability Compensation Rates for 2008

Percent Disabled	No Dependents	Veteran & Spouse
10%	\$117	---
20%	\$230	---
30%	\$356	\$398
40%	\$512	\$568
50%	\$728	\$799
60%	\$921	\$1,006
70%	\$1,161	\$1,260
80%	\$1,349	\$1,462
90%	\$1,517	\$1,644
100%	\$2,527	\$2,669

Effective 12/1/2007.

<http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/rates/comp01.htm#BM01>.

To learn more about VA's programs, OEF and OIF veterans, and other interested parties can visit the VA homepage <http://www.va.gov> or call 1-800-827-1000. For additional information on other benefits programs, please check online at http://www.vba.va.gov/benefit_facts/index.htm.

Must Apply To Be Considered

Veterans must apply separately for disability compensation. It is not provided automatically; nor does participation in a health registry substitute for filing a claim. VA Veterans Service Representatives (VSR) can provide the necessary application and assist veterans who need help in completing it. VSRs are located at all Regional Offices and in most VA medical centers. For help in locating a VSR near you, call the following toll-free telephone number: 1-800-827-1000.

Education Benefits for Returning Gulf War Veterans

Requests from Gulf War veterans for education benefits are receiving priority review and processing at VA in order to expedite opportunities to this deserving group. VA's Education Service administers education programs that provide benefits to qualified veterans, servicemembers, Reservists and dependents.

Information about educational programs and the applications process is available on the Internet at <http://www.gibill.va.gov> or by calling 1-888-GIBILL1.

Current programs include:

- Montgomery GI Bill - Active Duty (MGIB - AD)
- Montgomery GI Bill - Selected Reserve (MGIB-SR)
- Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP)
- Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program (DEA)
- Veterans Educational Assistance Program (VEAP)

Conditions Automatically Recognized for Service-Connection

Enacted in 1994, Public Law 103-446 allows VA to pay compensation to Gulf War veterans with certain chronic disabilities resulting from illnesses that VA could not diagnose that appeared during active duty in the Gulf War or within a specified time period after Gulf War service, which led to a degree of disability of ten (or more) percent.

Three health conditions suffered by some Gulf War veterans are presumptively (automatically) recognized by VA for service-connection. These are fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, and irritable bowel syndrome.

In 2001, Public Law 107-103, expanded the definition of "qualifying chronic disability" to include the three conditions listed above.

VA encourages veterans with any of these conditions — including those denied service connection before this law was passed — to apply for VA disability compensation.

IOM Report on PTSD Released

Military service in a war zone, including veterans of the 1991 Gulf War, may have an increased chance of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), other anxiety disorders, and depression, according to “Gulf War and Health: Volume 6. Physiologic, Psychologic, and Psychosocial Effects of Deployment-Related Stress,” a report from the Institute of Medicine. Serving in a war also increases the chances of alcohol abuse, accidental death, and suicide within the first few years after leaving the war zone, and marital and family conflict, including domestic violence, said the committee that wrote the report. The new report was requested by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, which asked for a comprehensive analysis of the scientific and medical evidence that connect deployment-related stress and long-term health problems, with a special focus on veterans of the 1991 Gulf War. The report documented a wide range of Gulf War stress, including Scud missile and artillery attack, contact with enemy prisoners of war or dead animals, direct combat duty, seeing someone killed or wounded, worry about chemical weapon attacks, separation from family, sexual assault, having a combat related injury, and the length of deployment.

The report indicates that chronic pain, chronic fatigue syndrome, drug abuse, fibromyalgia, gastrointestinal symptoms, incarceration, skin diseases, and unexplained illnesses may also be associated with the stresses of being in a war, but the evidence to support these links is weaker. For other health problems and adverse effects that the committee reviewed, the scientific data are lacking or contradictory; the committee could not decide if links between these ailments and deployment-related stress exist.

Although the report cannot offer definitive answers about the connections between many health problems and the stresses of war, it is clear that veterans who were deployed to war zones self-report more medical conditions and poorer health than veterans who were not deployed. Those who were deployed and have PTSD, in particular, tend to report more symptoms and poorer health, the committee found. PTSD often occurs together with other anxiety disorders, depression, and substance abuse; severity is associated with increased combat exposure.

To obtain better evidence that would give answers related to pre- and post-deployment health screenings of physical, mental, and emotional status, the committee said that the U.S. Department of Defense should conduct comprehensive, standardized evaluations of servicemembers’ medical conditions, psychiatric symptoms and diagnoses, and psychosocial status and trauma history before and after they deploy to war zones. Such screenings would provide baseline data for comparisons and information to determine the long-term consequences of deployment-related stress. In addition, screenings would help identify at-risk personnel who might benefit from targeted intervention programs during deployment — such as marital counseling or therapy for psychiatric or other disorders — and help DoD and VA choose which intervention programs to implement for veterans adjusting to post-deployment life.

Copies of Gulf War and Health, Volume 6: Physiologic, Psychologic, and Psychosocial Effects of Deployment-Related Stress are available from the National Academies Press at 202-334-3313 or 1-800-624-6242 or online at <http://www.nap.edu>.

Gulf War Veterans Experience Health Symptoms, Says IOM Report

According to a new report from the Institute of Medicine, Gulf War and Health Volume 4: Health Effects of Serving in the Gulf War, although veterans of the first Gulf War report many more symptoms of illness than soldiers of the same period who were not deployed, studies have found no evidence of a syndrome unique to Gulf War veterans. However, evidence shows that service in Southwest Asia during the 1990-1991 conflict places veterans at increased risk for developing anxiety disorders, depression, and substance-abuse problems, said the IOM committee. In addition, it found evidence that suggests there may be an elevated rate of the rare disorder amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) among Gulf War veterans.

The report endorses a policy of pre- and post-deployment medical screening of military personnel, as well as for improved monitoring of exposure to contaminants in the field. Most estimates of exposure now are based on self-reporting.

“Gulf War veterans consistently report experiencing a wide range of symptoms, and this is the case for both American veterans and military personnel from Canada, Australia, and other countries who served in the Persian Gulf,” said committee chair Lynn Goldman, professor of occupational and environmental health, Bloomberg School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore. “But because the symptoms vary greatly among individuals, they do not point to a syndrome unique to these veterans. Unfortunately, because of the lack of objective pre-deployment health information, we do not have the baseline data needed to draw more definitive conclusions about many aspects of these veterans’ long-term health.”

In addition to increased chances of experiencing a psychological condition such as depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Gulf War veterans also were more likely to sustain transportation-related injuries or deaths in the first few years upon return from the war, but not in later years, the committee found. These findings are consistent with studies of personnel who served in other armed conflicts in which higher rates of PTSD and motor vehicle fatalities were reported in the years following service.

The study was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Established in 1970 under the charter of the National Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Medicine provides independent, objective, evidence-based advice to policymakers, health professionals, the private sector, and the public. The National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, Institute of Medicine, and National Research Council make up the National Academies. Copies of Gulf War and Health, Volume 4: Health Effects of Serving in the Gulf War are available from the National Academies Press by calling 202-334-3313 or 1-800-624-6242, or on the Internet at <http://www.nap.edu>.

Where to Get Help and Additional Information

Active duty military personnel with questions or concerns about service in Southwest Asia (including Operations Desert Storm, Desert Shield, Iraqi Freedom, and Enduring Freedom) - contact your commanding officer or call the Department of Defense (DoD) Gulf War Veterans' Hotline (1-800-796-9699) for information. DoD also offers the "Direct Veterans Hotline," with the toll-free number 1-800-497-6261.

ODS, OIF and OEF veterans with concerns about their health should contact their nearest VA medical center. The telephone number can be found in your local telephone directory under Department of Veterans Affairs in the "U.S. Government" listings. Medical care is available, and a Gulf War Registry examination for ODS and OIF veterans is also available on request.

The VA Gulf War Information Helpline can also provide information and assistance. The toll-free telephone number is 1-800-PGW-VETS (1-800-749-8387).

Check our Web sites for more Gulf War information on health care and other benefits at <http://www.va.gov/GulfWar> and <http://www.va.gov/EnvironAgents>.

Gulf War veterans in need of marital/family counseling should contact the nearest VA medical center or VA Vet Center, also listed in your phonebook under Department of Veterans Affairs in the "U.S. Government" listings. For additional information about these programs call the VA Gulf War Information Helpline at 1-800-PGWVETS (1-800-749-8387).

Gulf War veterans seeking disability compensation for illnesses incurred in or aggravated by military service can contact a Veterans Benefits Counselor at the nearest VA regional office or health care facility at 1-800-827-1000, or call the VA Gulf War Information Helpline at 1-800-PGW-VETS (1-800-749-8387). You can also start a claim online at <http://www.va.gov>.

Gulf War veterans interested in learning about the wide range of benefit programs administered by VA should contact a Veterans Benefits Counselor at the nearest VA regional office or health care facility at 1-800-827-1000, or call the VA Gulf War Information Helpline at 1-800-PGW-VETS (1-800-749-8387).

Representatives of veterans service organizations, including the American Legion (1-800-433-3318), Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (1-800-VFW-1899 1-800-839-1899), Disabled American Veterans (1-877-426-2838), etc., have been very helpful to Gulf War veterans, especially veterans who are seeking disability compensation. *(These organizations are cited as examples. There are many other excellent organizations. VA does not endorse or recommend any one group over another.)*

County Veterans Service Officers also have been of great help to many military veterans, including those who served in the Gulf War, who are seeking benefits they earned through their service to the Nation.

For additional Federal benefit information, see VA's Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents booklet. This booklet is updated annually to reflect changes in law and policies and is available at <http://www.va.gov/opa/Is1/index.asp>. It also may be purchased from the U.S. Government Printing Office either at their website <http://bookstore.gpo.gov/> or by mail:

U.S. Government Printing Office
Superintendent of Documents
Washington, DC 20402.

VA's World Wide Web pages are updated throughout the year to present the most current information. The VA home page (<http://www.va.gov>) contains links to selections on compensation and pension benefits, health care benefits and services, burial and memorial benefits, and more.

About the "Review"

The Gulf War Review is produced by VA's Environmental Agents Service (EAS) to provide information on long-term health issues and other concerns of Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm veterans, their families, and others. The "Review" describes actions by VA and other Federal departments and agencies to respond to these concerns and gives updates on a wide range of VA programs for veterans. For earlier issues of this newsletter and related information, see our Web site <http://www.va.gov/GulfWar>. The most recent issues of this newsletter are dated July 2006 and May 2005. For information regarding the current conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan, please see the Operations Iraqi Freedom/Enduring Freedom Review on our Web site at <http://www.va.gov/EnvironAgents>.

This is the 39th issue of the Gulf War Review. EAS anticipates publication of the Gulf War Review newsletter once or twice a year, depending on the amount of news. This issue is current through March 2008.

Comments, questions, and suggestions for future issues are encouraged and can be sent to the Gulf War Review, Comments, Environmental Agents Service (131), VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20420.