

# AGENT ORANGE NEWSLETTER

INFORMATION FOR VIETNAM-ERA VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

## PTSD AND VIETNAM VETERANS: A LASTING ISSUE 40 YEARS LATER



Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is defined as having flashbacks, upsetting memories, and anxiety following a traumatic event. It was first officially recognized as a mental health condition in 1980, only five years after the end of the Vietnam War. For hundreds of years, these symptoms have been described under different names in soldiers from many wars. However, Vietnam Veterans with these symptoms were the first to have the term 'PTSD' applied to them. Despite the passage of 50 years since the war, for some Vietnam Veterans, PTSD remains a chronic reality of everyday life.

In 1983, Congress requested that VA conduct a study on the prevalence of PTSD and other postwar psychological problems among Vietnam Veterans. This was the first study to evaluate the prevalence of PTSD among Veterans, and became known as the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study (NVVRS). The NVVRS brought greater attention to the issue of PTSD as it found that as many as 15 percent of Veterans had PTSD.

### NATIONAL VIETNAM VETERANS LONGITUDINAL STUDY

More recently, Congress requested that VA conduct a follow-up study among the participants of the NVVRS, known as the National Vietnam Veterans Longitudinal Study (NVVLS). The NVVLS was completed in December 2013, and was the first study to measure the long-term health and mental health of Vietnam Veterans.

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## AGENT ORANGE AND TYPE 2 DIABETES: TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR HEALTH!

Type 2 diabetes is common among older adults, including Vietnam Veterans. The Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences published a report "Veterans and Agent Orange: Herbicide/Dioxin Exposure and Type 2 Diabetes" in 2000. This report, and its 2002 and 2004 updates, found evidence of an association between exposure to herbicides and type 2 diabetes. Veterans who were potentially exposed to Agent Orange or other herbicides during military service do not have to prove a connection between their diabetes and service to be eligible to receive VA health care and disability compensation.

### WHAT IS TYPE 2 DIABETES?

Type 2 diabetes is a chronic (lifelong) condition that keeps your body from turning food into energy. It

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## PTSD AND VIETNAM VETERANS: A LASTING ISSUE 40 YEARS LATER

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Both the NVVRS and NVVLS compared two groups of Veterans: those deployed to the Vietnam War (“theater Veterans”), and those who served during the Vietnam-era, but were not deployed to the Vietnam theater (“era Veterans”). The NVVLS assessment of the Veterans’ physical and mental health included a self-report survey, a phone interview, and for some randomly selected participants, an additional phone interview led by a mental health clinician that focused on issues including PTSD, depression, and substance abuse.

While NVVLS findings confirm that the majority of Vietnam theater Veterans are both mentally and physically healthy, a significant number are still suffering from PTSD symptoms and other chronic health issues related to their service.

VA is using the results of this study and other similar studies to better understand the long-term effects of military service. The results will allow VA to improve care and to better address Veterans’ long-term health needs, as well as anticipate future health needs of recent Veterans.

For more information on VA research related to the health of Vietnam Veterans, visit [www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/research-studies.asp](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/research-studies.asp).

View the infographic to the right to learn more about the NVVLS study. ★

## NATIONAL VIETNAM VETERANS LONGITUDINAL STUDY (NVVLS) KEY FINDINGS

The 2013 NVVLS measured the long-term health and mental health of Vietnam Veterans. Results of the study were compared to the results of a similar study completed in 1987 on the same sample of Veterans. Findings confirm that while the majority of Vietnam Veterans are both mentally and physically healthy, a significant number are still suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other chronic health issues related to their service.

### MORTALITY

MALE THEATER VETERANS WHO HAD PTSD IN 1987 **WERE NEARLY TWICE AS LIKELY** TO HAVE DIED COMPARED TO THOSE WHO DID NOT HAVE PTSD



WITH PTSD WITHOUT PTSD

MALE AND FEMALE THEATER VETERANS WITH HIGH EXPOSURE TO WARZONE STRESS **WERE NEARLY TWICE AS LIKELY** TO HAVE DIED THAN THOSE WITH LOW OR MODERATE WARZONE STRESS EXPOSURE

### MENTAL HEALTH

2013 (40 OR MORE YEARS AFTER WARTIME SERVICE)

AMONG THEATER VETERANS, 7% OF FEMALES AND 11% OF MALES STILL HAD PTSD



AMONG THEATER VETERANS WITH PTSD

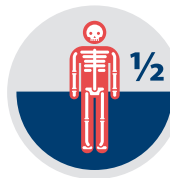
**37%** ALSO MET CRITERIA FOR MAJOR DEPRESSION



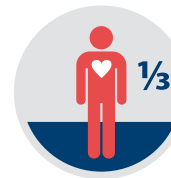
**<1%** LESS THAN 1% OF VETERANS WITHOUT ANY PTSD MET CRITERIA FOR MAJOR DEPRESSION

### PHYSICAL HEALTH

THEATER VETERANS



**MORE THAN HALF** REPORTED A HISTORY OF MUSCULOSKELETAL CONDITIONS (E.G. ARTHRITIS)



**NEARLY ONE-THIRD** REPORTED A HISTORY OF CIRCULATORY DISEASES (E.G. HEART DISEASE) AND NERVOUS SYSTEM DISEASES (E.G. DEAFNESS)

THOSE WITH CURRENT WARZONE PTSD WERE **MORE LIKELY** TO REPORT A HISTORY OF CHRONIC CONDITIONS

### USE OF PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

**NEARLY 60%** OF THEATER VETERANS REPORTED RECEIVING OUTPATIENT HEALTH CARE IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS FOR PHYSICAL CONDITIONS



OF THOSE, **37%** RECEIVED CARE WITHIN VA

**2/3** TWO-THIRDS OF VETERANS WITH CURRENT WARZONE-RELATED PTSD DISCUSSED BEHAVIORAL HEALTH OR SUBSTANCE ABUSE CONCERNS WITH PROVIDERS

SOURCE: [http://vaveteran.org/35-1/35-1\\_longitudinalstudy.html](http://vaveteran.org/35-1/35-1_longitudinalstudy.html)

## AGENT ORANGE AND TYPE 2 DIABETES: TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR HEALTH!

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may leave you feeling tired and run-down. Controlling your diabetes means making some changes that may be challenging at first. Controlling the level of sugar in your bloodstream is the key to managing your diabetes. Poorly controlled diabetes can result in complications including heart disease, kidney failure, vision loss, and damage to the nerves and blood vessels in your upper and lower extremities.

There are several other risk factors for type 2 diabetes including: being over 45 years of age, having a family history of diabetes (related to both lifestyle and genetic factors), not getting enough exercise, having unhealthy eating habits, being obese, and (in women) having had diabetes during pregnancy.

### WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I HAVE TYPE 2 DIABETES?

There are several ways that you can reduce the impact of diabetes on your health, including:

- Work on losing those extra pounds! Being overweight is

the single biggest risk factor for developing type 2 diabetes

- Exercise for at least 30 minutes a day
- Eat a low-fat and high-fiber diet
- Practice healthy living – this includes staying tobacco free, limiting alcohol consumption, and staying active

It is also important that you work closely with your VA Patient Aligned Care Team (or your medical provider) so that they know what matters to you and what your goals are for a healthy life. Together, you can come up with a treatment plan that works for you. In addition to the methods listed above, this might include taking certain medications, monitoring blood sugars, and taking care of any other medical conditions you may have.

### VA BENEFITS FOR VETERANS WITH TYPE 2 DIABETES

Veterans with type 2 diabetes who were exposed to herbicides during service may be eligible for disability compensation and VA health care as

well as a number of other benefits, resources, and services. In addition, Veterans who served in areas where Agent Orange was sprayed may also be eligible for a free Agent Orange Registry health exam.

The resources available to Veterans who may have been exposed to Agent Orange and have developed type 2 diabetes later in life are designed to promote health and wellness.

Visit [www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/conditions/diabetes.asp](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/conditions/diabetes.asp) to learn more about type 2 diabetes and how to take charge of your health today. ★

## THE FASTEST WAY TO GET A DISABILITY CLAIM DECISION

If you're a Veteran who needs to file a disability compensation claim for the first time or you need to submit a new claim for a previous service-related condition, there is now a faster, easier way to get a claim decision. With the help of your local Veterans Service Officer, you can file an electronic claim, or eClaim, through eBenefits and get a faster VA decision.

### WHAT IS AN eCLAIM?

Veterans now have the ability to start and submit claims online through the VA/DoD eBenefits web portal. All you need is a free Level 2 Premium eBenefits account to start your eClaim today. An eClaim removes all of the paper clutter connected with filing a traditional paper claim. You can submit your information online into VA's claims processing

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## ENROLL IN VA'S AGENT ORANGE REGISTRY

Were you exposed to Agent Orange during military service? If so, you may be at risk of certain cancers and other diseases that may be related to Agent Orange exposure.

Schedule an Agent Orange registry exam at your local VA medical facility to help determine if your health problems are related to exposure during military service.

## ABOUT THE AGENT ORANGE REGISTRY HEALTH EXAM

The no-cost Agent Orange Registry health exam includes an exposure history, medical history, physical exam, and any tests if needed. Following the exam, a VA health professional will discuss the results with you in-person, and in a follow-up letter.

The registry health exam will provide valuable information and

allow VA to better understand and respond to related health problems more effectively.

Important points about registry health exams:

- Free to eligible Veterans, and without a co-payment
- Not a disability compensation exam or required for other VA benefits
- Enrollment in VA's health care system is not necessary

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## HAVE YOU HEARD OF EXPOSURE ED?

VA launched a new mobile app, Exposure Ed, to help health care providers better address Veterans' questions about the health effects of military exposures and exposure-related benefits and services.

The app allows providers to quickly identify potential military exposures and associated health effects that can be discussed during a Veteran's regular medical appointment, exposure assessment, or environmental registry evaluation. Not only can information be searched by location or service date, it can also be pasted into a note that can be emailed or printed for the Veteran.

Other app features include tips on how to discuss exposure concerns with Veterans, information on presumptive service-connected health conditions and diseases, a tool to locate VA facilities, and VA's exposure-related policies and programs.

Intended for health care providers and staff, Exposure Ed is available for free download from the Apple iTunes store for use on the iPhone, iPad, and iPod Touch devices. The app will be available for Android devices later in 2015.

At your next visit, ask your provider,

***"Have you heard of Exposure Ed?"***



LEARN MORE ABOUT THE APP

**Visit: [mobile.va.gov/app/exposure-ed](http://mobile.va.gov/app/exposure-ed)**

## ENROLL IN VA'S AGENT ORANGE REGISTRY

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- Based on Veterans' recollection of service, not on their military records
- Will not confirm exposure to Agent Orange
- Veterans can receive additional registry exams, if new problems develop
- Veterans' family members are not eligible for an Agent Orange Registry health exam

## JOIN THE AGENT ORANGE REGISTRY

If you were exposed to Agent Orange during military service, you may be eligible for the Agent Orange Registry health exam. (For a list of Agent Orange exposure locations, see the article on page 7.)

Find your local VA Environmental Health Coordinator at [www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp) and contact them about getting an Agent Orange Registry health exam today!

For more information about the Agent Orange Registry health exam, visit [www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/benefits/registry-exam.asp](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/benefits/registry-exam.asp). ★

## DISEASES ASSOCIATED WITH AGENT ORANGE

VA assumes that certain diseases can be related to a Veteran's qualifying military service. These are known as "presumptive diseases." VA has recognized certain cancers and other health problems as presumptive diseases associated with exposure to Agent Orange or other herbicides during military service. Veterans and their survivors may be eligible for benefits for the diseases listed to the right. ★

### AL AMYLOIDOSIS

A rare disease caused when an abnormal protein, amyloid, enters tissues or organs.

### CHRONIC B-CELL LEUKEMIAS

A type of cancer which affects white blood cells.

### CHLORACNE (OR SIMILAR ACNEFORM DISEASE)

A skin condition that occurs soon after exposure to chemicals and looks like common forms of acne seen in teenagers. Under VA's rating regulations, it must be at least 10 percent disabling within one year of exposure to herbicides.

### DIABETES MELLITUS TYPE 2

A disease characterized by high blood sugar levels resulting from the body's inability to respond properly to the hormone insulin.

### HODGKIN'S DISEASE

A malignant lymphoma (cancer) characterized by progressive enlargement of the lymph nodes, liver, and spleen, and by progressive anemia.

### ISCHEMIC HEART DISEASE

A disease characterized by a reduced supply of blood to the heart, that leads to chest pain.

### MULTIPLE MYELOMA

A cancer of plasma cells, a type of white blood cell in bone marrow.

### NON-HODGKIN'S LYMPHOMA

A group of cancers that affect the lymph glands and other lymphatic tissue.

### PARKINSON'S DISEASE

A progressive disorder of the nervous system that affects muscle movement.

### PERIPHERAL NEUROPATHY, EARLY-ONSET

A nervous system condition that causes numbness, tingling, and motor weakness. Under VA's rating regulations, it must be at least 10 percent disabling within one year of herbicide exposure.

### PORPHYRIA CUTANEA TARDA

A disorder characterized by liver dysfunction and by thinning and blistering of the skin in sun-exposed areas. Under VA's rating regulations, it must be at least 10 percent disabling within one year of exposure to herbicides.

### PROSTATE CANCER

Cancer of the prostate; one of the most common cancers among men.

### RESPIRATORY CANCERS (INCLUDES LUNG CANCER)

Cancers of the lung, larynx, trachea, and bronchus.

### SOFT TISSUE SARCOMAS (OTHER THAN OSTEOSARCOMA, CHONDROSARCOMA, KAPOSI'S SARCOMA, OR MESOTHELIOMA)

A group of different types of cancers in body tissues such as muscle, fat, blood and lymph vessels, and connective tissues.



## VA CONTINUES TO STUDY THE HEALTH OF VIETNAM VETERANS

In the last 40 years, since the end of the Vietnam War, VA has learned a great deal about the health of Vietnam Veterans. Using research studies that look at the military exposures and health history of large numbers of Veterans, VA is able to learn about the effects of military service in Vietnam.

Some studies compared Vietnam Veterans to Veterans who did not serve in Vietnam. This provided VA with specific information about risks for certain cancers and diseases that could be related to exposures that occurred in country. Recent successful studies include the National Vietnam Veterans Longitudinal Study, which assessed war zone stress and postwar readjustment among a group of Veterans who were part of a study done in the 1990s. The Veterans Twin Registry has also long been a source of data for many studies of military service from pairs of twins, one of whom served in Vietnam, and one who did not. Other studies and surveys have been conducted by VA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Veterans Service Organizations, U.S. states, and foreign countries.

VA will soon be starting a large population based survey of the health of Vietnam Veterans, called the Vietnam Morbidity Study.

### VIETNAM MORBIDITY STUDY

The Vietnam Morbidity Study aims to study general and selected physical conditions. It is designed to determine if Vietnam Veterans



now have new or different patterns of illness that are unlike their non-Vietnam deployed military counterparts, and members of the U.S. population. In addition, VA intends to survey subgroups of Vietnam and Vietnam era Veterans, such as Blue Water Navy Veterans, to learn more about their health conditions.

Findings from this study will be important in informing VA about how to provide high quality health care, prevention services, and compensation benefits for this large group of Americans who are mostly in their late 60s and older. VA can use the results to plan and provide care and benefits warranted by the special needs of Vietnam Veterans.

### PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

Thousands of Vietnam Veterans, Vietnam Era Veterans, and members of the U.S. public who did not serve in Vietnam will be invited to

participate in this study. Participants will be selected from a scientifically designed national sampling plan. VA anticipates that the study will consist of one short initial survey, one longer in-depth survey, and a request to your health care provider to provide information from your medical records. Participants will receive full information about every aspect of the study and will sign a consent form before starting the surveys.

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**If you are invited to join the study, please participate! Each participant is valuable to providing complete and accurate information about the health of Vietnam Veterans. ★**

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## AGENT ORANGE EXPOSURE LOCATIONS



Exposure to Agent Orange is recognized by VA in the following locations:

### VIETNAM AND BROWN WATER VETERANS

The inland waterways of Vietnam are often referred to as “brown water” because of their muddy color. The naval vessels operating on them are referred to as the Brown Water Navy and/or Mobile Riverine Force. Those who made brief visits ashore and/or served on a ship that was operated on the inland waterways of Vietnam are often referred to as “Brown Water Veterans.”

### BLUE WATER VETERANS

The deep offshore waters of Vietnam are often referred to as “blue waters” and naval vessels operating on them are referred to as the Blue Water Navy. Blue Water Veterans are not presumed to have been exposed to Agent Orange or other herbicides unless they actually set foot in Vietnam (including for liberal leave or work detail) or served aboard ships on its inland waterways between January 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975. The Blue Water Navy operated large ships which were used to carry

out their missions along the Vietnam coastal waters. Some offshore ships including hospital ships, harbor repair ships, mine sweepers, seaplane tenders, and destroyers sent crew members ashore. Veterans aboard these ships who can show they were on shore will be eligible for the presumption of exposure.

### U.S. NAVY AND COAST GUARD SHIPS IN VIETNAM

VA maintains an evolving list of U.S. Navy and Coast Guard ships associated with military service in Vietnam and possible exposure to Agent Orange based on military records. This includes ships of the Brown Water and Blue Water Navy that operated on Vietnam’s inland waterways, docked to shore or pier in Vietnam, or that delivered supplies or troops ashore. The alphabetized ships list is available at [www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/shiplist/index.asp](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/shiplist/index.asp).

### KOREAN DEMILITARIZED ZONE

Veterans who served in a unit operating along the Korean

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## THE FASTEST WAY TO GET A DISABILITY CLAIM DECISION

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system. This allows VA to more quickly process your information and make a faster claim decision. For an even faster disability compensation claim decision, Veterans can also choose to file an electronic Fully Developed Claim (FDC) through eBenefits.

### WHAT IS AN ELECTRONIC FDC?

When you provide all required evidence at the same time you submit a claim electronically through eBenefits AND certify that you have no more evidence, you are filing an electronic FDC. Providing all your documentation up front helps VA issue the fastest claim decision possible. Be aware, your claim will be removed from the FDC Program and processed through the traditional claim route if you do not include sufficient evidence, fail to attend your VA medical appointment, or if additional evidence is received after submission. You can learn more about the FDC Program and filing an eClaim at [www.benefits.va.gov/fdc](http://www.benefits.va.gov/fdc) or visit the VBA Media and Publications Page at [www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/media-publications.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/media-publications.asp) to view informative videos on these topics.

Contact a Veterans Service Officer for help filing an eClaim or electronic FDC, or visit [www.eBenefits.va.gov](http://www.eBenefits.va.gov) and follow the guided step-by-step process. Agents at VA’s toll-free number, 1-800-827-1000, can also answer any questions you may have. Don’t get stuck waiting for a claim decision longer than you have to – take control of your claim and file an eClaim today! ★



## AGENT ORANGE EXPOSURE LOCATIONS

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demilitarized zone anytime between April 1, 1968 and August 31, 1971, and who have a disease VA recognizes as associated with Agent Orange exposure, are presumed to have been exposed to herbicides.

## THAILAND MILITARY BASES

Vietnam-era Veterans, including U.S. Air Force and Army Veterans, whose service involved duty on the perimeters of military bases in Thailand anytime between February 28, 1961 and May 7, 1975 may qualify for VA benefits.

## HERBICIDE TESTS AND STORAGE OUTSIDE VIETNAM

The Department of Defense gave VA a list of dates and locations outside of Vietnam where herbicides were tested and stored. To view the complete list, visit [www.publichealth.va.gov/docs/agentorange/dod\\_herbicides\\_outside\\_vietnam.pdf](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/docs/agentorange/dod_herbicides_outside_vietnam.pdf).

For more information on each location, visit [www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/locations/index.asp](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/locations/index.asp). ★

## ★ BE ON THE LOOKOUT! ★

VA contracts with the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences to review evidence on long-term health effects of Agent Orange and other herbicides on Vietnam Veterans. The next report will be "Veterans and Agent Orange: Update 2016." Check for updates at [www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/publications/institute-of-medicine.asp](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/publications/institute-of-medicine.asp).

## ADDRESS CHANGES

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ATTN: Mailing list update (005OP6.2.1.10A)  
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