

DEPLETED URANIUM (DU)

INFORMATION FOR VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES



WHAT IS DEPLETED URANIUM?

Depleted uranium (DU) is a byproduct of the uranium enrichment process for nuclear fuel production. DU has approximately 60 percent of the radioactivity and the same chemical toxicity as natural uranium. Since it is a naturally occurring element in our environment, we are exposed to small amounts of it daily. However, exposure to large amounts of radiation can negatively affect health. Since the Gulf War, DU projectiles have been used by U.S. forces due to their superior ability to penetrate armor.

VETERANS POTENTIALLY AFFECTED

- Gulf War Veterans exposed to depleted uranium through friendly fire
- Others potentially exposed to DU, including Bosnia, Gulf War, and Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom Veterans

WHEN IS DEPLETED URANIUM HAZARDOUS?

DU is a potential health hazard if it enters into the body through embedded fragments, contaminated wounds, inhalation, or ingestion. When a projectile made with DU penetrates a vehicle, small pieces of DU are created. These fragments can scatter and become embedded in muscle and soft tissue. In addition to DU wounds, soldiers exposed to DU in struck vehicles may inhale or swallow small airborne DU particles.

The potential for negative health effects is related to the amount of DU in a person's body. Simply riding in a vehicle with DU weapons or shielding does not expose individuals to significant amounts of DU or external radiation. For more information on DU health effects, visit www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/depleted_uranium.

DEPLETED URANIUM FOLLOW-UP PROGRAM

VA's Depleted Uranium (DU) Follow-up Program at the Baltimore VA Medical Center studies the health effects of DU exposure and provides treatment recommendations, including surgical removal of embedded fragments. Veterans in this program who were exposed to DU from embedded fragments receive detailed physical exams and clinical tests of organ system function.

For other Veterans concerned about DU exposure during deployment, the program offers screening including an exposure questionnaire and a mail-in, spot urine test for DU. Veterans do not need to be enrolled in VA health care to participate.

If you think you were exposed to harmful DU conditions, such as being near a vehicle or building when it was struck by friendly fire or directly afterwards, contact a VA medical center near you to be screened for DU exposure.

- Visit www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp to find a listing of Environmental Health Coordinators at VA medical centers.
- Call 1-877-222-8387 to reach the nearest VA medical center.

For information on the DU Follow-Up Program visit www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/depleted_uranium/followup_program.asp.

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