



Talking to Veterans about Airborne Hazards and Burn Pit Exposures

INFORMATION FOR HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

At VA, we know it's important for Veterans to hear from their providers and care teams about potential health concerns related to their military service. Exposure to airborne hazards may be a concern for Veterans you serve, even if they aren't currently experiencing health issues.

Read on to learn more about important information to share with Veterans. They want to hear from you.

1 Burn pits are not the only hazard Veterans may have been exposed to during their military service.

Whether Veterans served in the First Gulf War or in the more recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, they may have been exposed to a variety of other airborne hazards. Many health conditions related to these hazards are temporary and should resolve after the exposure ends.

Longer-term health issues that Veterans experience may be caused by a combination of hazardous exposures, injuries, or illnesses including:

- The smoke and fumes from open burn pits
- Sand, dust, and particulate matter
- General air pollution common in certain countries
- Fuel, aircraft exhaust, and other mechanical fumes
- Smoke from oil well fires
- Blast or noise injuries

In particular, Veterans who served in the First Gulf War may not realize information about airborne hazard exposures pertains to their deployment experience. You can help them make the connection.

2 The VA Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry (AHOBPR) can help us provide better care to all Veterans.

VA established the registry in 2014 to put data to work for Veterans and help us understand the potential health effects of airborne hazard exposures.

By joining the registry, Veterans can provide information that supports ongoing research. It can also help them identify health concerns, discuss them with their providers, and get follow-up care.

Registry Eligibility

Veterans are eligible if they served in the Southwest Asia theater of operations any time after August 2, 1990 or in Afghanistan or Djibouti on or after September 11, 2001. Visit www.publichealth.va.gov/airbornehazards to learn more.

3 The registry includes two parts: an online questionnaire and a free, optional health evaluation.

The **registry questionnaire** asks questions about Veterans' deployments, health history, lifestyle, and other factors. It usually takes about an hour to complete, depending on their number of deployments. Please encourage Veterans to complete the entire questionnaire – more complete information helps support better research.

After they finish the questionnaire, Veterans can also schedule an **environmental health evaluation** at their convenience. Environmental health clinicians who perform the exams may also refer Veterans for additional specialty evaluations if needed.

Veterans can schedule their exam by contacting their facility's environmental health coordinator: www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp.

4 We encourage healthy Veterans to join the registry.

Veterans can join the registry even if they don't think they were exposed to specific airborne hazards or are not experiencing any symptoms or illnesses. The participation of healthy Veterans helps to strengthen research and improve the care and services we provide to all Veterans. It can also help them proactively monitor their health and discuss health issues that may arise in the future with their providers.

5 Joining the registry cannot negatively impact a Veteran's VA claim or their access to VA health care.

The registry is separate from the VA claims process and the VA health care application process. However, Veterans can save and submit their responses to the questionnaire or notes from their medical evaluation to support their claim if they choose.

6 We encourage all Veterans concerned about their military exposures to talk to their provider, apply for VA health care, and file a claim.

Even if Veterans are not eligible to participate in the registry, they may be eligible for VA care, compensation, and benefits. Visit www.publichealth.va.gov/airbornehazards to learn more.

Evaluating Health Concerns Related to Airborne Hazard Exposures

Veterans seeking care may have a variety of symptoms and exposure concerns. If your patient is experiencing health issues they believe are related to their exposures, use existing standards of care to evaluate and treat their symptoms and underlying health conditions. You may also refer a Veteran for specialty evaluations.

When discussing exposures with Veterans, remember to:

- Listen and show you take their concerns seriously.
- Refer them for a consultation with the War Related Illness and Injury Study Center (WRIISC) if clinically appropriate.
- Encourage them to continue to work with their care team and file a claim for compensation and benefits if they have not done so already.

Download Exposure Ed Today

VA's Exposure Ed app can help you engage Veterans in discussions about their military exposures. Through this free app, you can quickly share information and search VA facilities and programs to help get Veterans the care they need.

The app is available for download on Android and Apple devices. Visit mobile.VA.gov/app/exposure-ed to learn more.



Scan this QR code with your smartphone camera to learn more.

Apply for VA Health Care: www.VA.gov/health-care or call 877-222-838

File a Claim: www.VA.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim



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