

POST-9/11 VET NEWSLETTER

INFORMATION FOR VETERANS WHO SERVED IN OPERATIONS ENDURING FREEDOM, IRAQI FREEDOM, AND NEW DAWN

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THE BURN PIT REGISTRY: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

In 2014, VA launched the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry for Veterans and Servicemembers who were exposed to open air burn pits at military sites in Iraq and Afghanistan. It contains health information collected from thousands of Veterans and active duty Servicemembers who completed a questionnaire online. VA is studying the health of exposed Veterans and Servicemembers through the Burn Pit Registry and other research efforts.

If you are a Veteran or Servicemember who served in eligible locations you can participate in the Burn Pit Registry. Even if you do not have any current symptoms, VA encourages you to take part.

Here's what you need to know about the Burn Pit Registry:

1. The Burn Pit Registry tells VA about your exposures.

By completing an online questionnaire, Veterans and Servicemembers can use the Burn Pit Registry to report their exposures and related health concerns, and to document their health. As the long-term effects of exposure to airborne hazards during service are still relatively unknown, documenting exposures early ensures that participants will be monitored over time and that VA can improve programs to provide the necessary health care and resources should any health problems emerge.



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EXPOSURE TO CHEMICAL WARFARE AGENTS

Servicemembers who handled or demolished explosive ordnances during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation New Dawn (OND) may have been exposed to chemical warfare agents (CWAs) and may experience related health effects. While Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) personnel are most likely to have been exposed, non-EOD personnel may have also been exposed during Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attacks or during the open air demolition or transport of CWAs.

CWAs are toxic chemicals used as a method of warfare, such as mustard agents or sarin. A list of CWAs may be found on Schedule 1 of the Chemical Weapons Convention (www.cwc.gov/cwc_treaty_chemicals_schedules.html). Research on the long-term health effects of exposure to CWAs is limited, but VA is collaborating with the Department of Defense (DoD) to better understand the potential health effects.

WERE YOU EXPOSED?

VA and DoD are currently working together to identify and contact active duty Servicemembers and Veterans who may have been exposed to CWAs during OIF and OND. To date, approximately 7,000 Servicemembers with possible exposure have been identified.

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THE BURN PIT REGISTRY: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

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2. The registry provides a summary of your health for you and your health care providers.

The Burn Pit Registry helps participants to become more aware of their own health and allows them to receive updates about ongoing VA studies and treatments. It also helps researchers to study the health effects of burn pits and other airborne hazards, resulting in better long-term health care from VA for current and future Veterans and Servicemembers. Those who are eligible can get an optional, no-cost, in-person medical evaluation.

3. Many Veterans who deployed after 1990 are eligible to join the registry.

VA uses deployment information from the Department of Defense (DoD) to determine eligibility for the Burn Pit Registry. To be eligible, you must be a Veteran or Servicemember who served in the Southwest Asia theater of operations at any time on or after August 2, 1990, or Afghanistan or Djibouti on or after September 11, 2001. This includes the following countries, bodies of water, and the airspace above these locations:

- Iraq
- Afghanistan
- Kuwait
- Saudi Arabia
- Bahrain
- Djibouti
- Gulf of Aden
- Gulf of Oman
- Oman
- Qatar
- United Arab Emirates
- Waters of the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, and Red Sea



Dr. Stephen Hunt, National Director, Veterans Affairs Post-Deployment Integrated Care Initiative

“The Burn Pit Registry is just a reflection of how far we’ve come at VA; how much we’re improving in taking care of individuals with deployment related exposure concerns, and in taking care of Veterans in general. So I would really recommend that people come in and check out the program.”

4. Sign up for the Burn Pit Registry in three easy steps.

To sign up for the Burn Pit Registry, visit <https://veteran.mobilehealth.va.gov/AHBurnPitRegistry>.

Step 1: Make sure you have a DoD Self-Service Level 2 Logon (Premium DS Logon Level 2) account. If you don’t already have one, you can apply for a DS Logon account at <https://myaccess.dmdc.osd.mil>. While a Premium DS Logon Level 2 account is required to access the registry at this time, VA is exploring other ways to access the registry website in the future.

Step 2: Complete and submit the online questionnaire. The questionnaire takes about 40 minutes to complete. You can complete it all at once, or log out and return later.

Step 3: Print and save your completed questionnaire for your records. You can use your completed questionnaire when talking to a health care provider about your exposures.

5. Technical support is available for the registry.

Call the Registry Help Desk at **1-877-470-5947** from 8 AM to 8 PM Eastern Standard Time Monday through Friday to get questions answered and for help

with any technical problems you might experience while registering. Frequently asked questions and answers about the registry are also available at <https://veteran.mobilehealth.va.gov/AHBurnPitRegistry/index.html#page/faq>.

To learn more about burn pits and burn pit research, visit www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/burnpits/index.asp.

For more information on the Burn Pit Registry, and to sign up, visit <https://veteran.mobilehealth.va.gov/AHBurnPitRegistry>.

JOIN THE REGISTRY

All eligible Veterans and Servicemembers who were exposed to airborne hazards during deployment are encouraged to participate in the registry. Even if you’re not showing any symptoms, your participation is important. Help improve health awareness and long-term health for you and all Veterans—join the registry today! ★



BURN PIT REGISTRY KEY FINDINGS

The VA Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry allows eligible Veterans and Servicemembers to document their exposures to burn pits and other airborne hazards during military service, and to report related health concerns through an online questionnaire. The following summarizes key findings based on the information entered into the registry by Veterans and active duty Servicemembers from April 25, 2014 to December 31, 2014.

PARTICIPANTS



Veterans and Servicemembers have filled out the registry survey.

MOST PARTICIPANTS ARE MEN

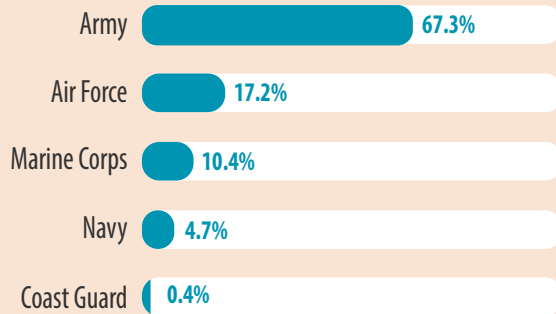


89.5% Men

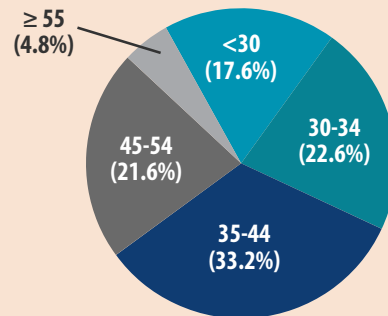


10.5% Women

MORE THAN TWO-THIRDS SERVED IN THE ARMY

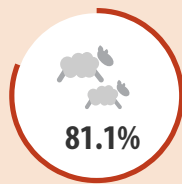


THEY RANGE IN AGE FROM 20-79 YEARS

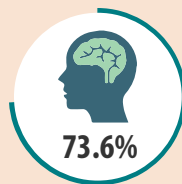


HEALTH PROBLEMS

The most common doctor-diagnosed health problems reported by participants were insomnia and neurological problems.



Insomnia



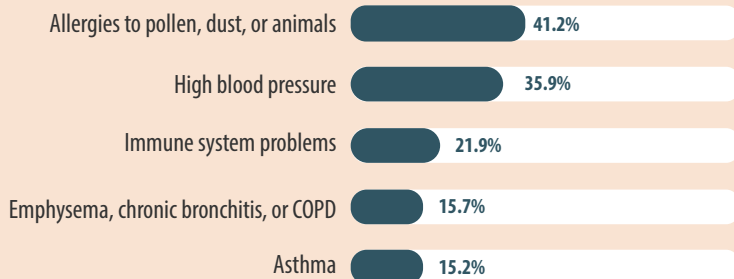
Neurological Problems



ABOUT 89%

of participants said that they have trouble doing certain physical activities such as running, jogging, walking a mile, or walking up 10 steps.

Other commonly diagnosed health problems include:



It's important to remember that findings from the registry alone can't tell us whether exposure to burn pits, dust storms, or other hazards caused any of these health conditions. The more Veterans and Servicemembers who join the registry, the more VA can learn about the health effects of exposure to burn pits and other airborne hazards.

For more information on registry findings and where to sign up, visit www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/burnpits/registry.asp.

*Percentages may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: www.publichealth.va.gov/docs/exposures/va-ahobp-registry-data-report-june2015.pdf



EXPOSURE TO CHEMICAL WARFARE AGENTS

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If you believe you may have been exposed to CWAs and have not been contacted, please call the DoD hotline at **1-800-497-6261**. VA and DoD would like to ensure that your exposures are documented, and that you are aware of any related health care benefits.

HAVE YOU COMPLETED YOUR FREE GULF WAR REGISTRY EXAM?

If you served during OIF or OND you are eligible to receive a free, in-person VA Gulf War Registry exam. To make an appointment, contact your local OEF/OIF/OND Team (www.oefoif.va.gov/caremanagement.asp) or your local Environmental Health Coordinator (www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp).

The Gulf War Registry is a helpful tool for Veterans and researchers. It is a way for Veterans to learn about the possible health effects of exposure to environmental hazards, and helps VA improve care for those health effects. To learn more, visit www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/gulfwar/benefits/registry-exam.asp.

You may also be eligible to participate in VA's Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry. By completing an online questionnaire, you can report your exposures and related health concerns. Read the article on page 1 for more information on the Burn Pit Registry.

For more information on exposure to CWAs, visit www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/chemical-warfare-agents-oif.asp. ★

USING THE VETERANS CHOICE PROGRAM: RESOURCES TO HELP ADDRESS EXPOSURE CONCERNS WITH PROVIDERS OUTSIDE VA



On August 7, 2014, President Obama signed into law the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (Choice Act), calling for VA to implement the Veterans Choice Program. The Veterans Choice Program is one of the ways VA is improving access to care for Veterans. It allows eligible Veterans to receive care from non-VA facilities, connecting them to timely and convenient access to health care, instead of waiting for a VA appointment or traveling long distances to a VA facility. Veterans who live more than 40 miles away from a VA medical facility or have an excessive travel burden are eligible.

VA's goal will always be to provide Veterans with timely, high-quality care. Even if you choose to receive care from a non-VA facility, you can still take advantage of the many VA resources available to you.

MILITARY EXPOSURES

Veterans may have been exposed to a range of environmental and chemical hazards during military service including sand, dust, and particulates; burn pits; infectious diseases; and other hazards. VA offers several programs and resources related to military exposure concerns for non-VA providers and Veterans that are not receiving care through VA's health care system. The following are a few examples of resources that you can share with your non-VA health care provider.

EXPOSURE ED MOBILE APP

If you have concerns related to military exposures that you would like to discuss with your non-VA provider, you can refer them to Exposure Ed, a new mobile app launched by VA to help health care providers better address Veterans'

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RESULTS ARE IN: STUDY ON THE HEALTH OF OEF/OIF VETERANS



13.5 percent of participants overall screened positive for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

The results are in from one of the largest studies on the health of Veterans who served during Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).

In 2009, VA initiated the “National Health Study for a New Generation of U.S. Veterans.” Veterans who served between October 2001 and June 2008, including OEF/OIF deployed and non-deployed Veterans, were invited to participate in the study by completing a questionnaire on paper, online, or by telephone.

More than 20,500 Veterans participated and answered questions on a wide range of health topics including their health care use, illnesses and symptoms, health behaviors, and potential exposures.

VA is using the results of this study to gain insight on the overall health of recent Veterans, better understand the types of health services Veterans need, and to improve the quality of care at VA. Researchers continue to review data from this study and publish findings.

For more information and updated research findings, visit www.publichealth.va.gov/epidemiology/studies/new-generation.

SINUSITIS, ASTHMA, AND BRONCHITIS

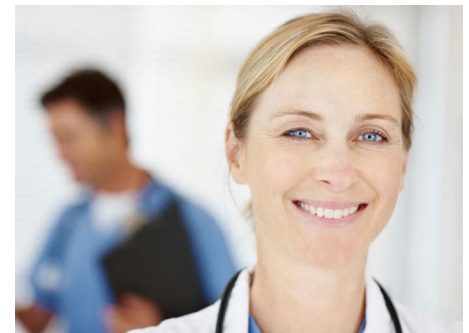
OEF/OIF deployed Veterans were 29 percent more likely to report that they were diagnosed with sinusitis compared to non-deployed Veterans. Researchers found no significant difference in self-reported asthma or bronchitis between OEF/OIF deployed Veterans and those who were deployed elsewhere during the same time period.

INFERTILITY

As many as 15.8 percent of women and 13.8 percent of men who participated in the study reported that they had experienced infertility. Infertility is defined as trying with a partner to get pregnant for more than 12 months. Infertility among the general U.S. population ranges from 8 percent to 20 percent, depending on the definition used.

PTSD

Study results revealed that 13.5 percent of participants overall screened positive for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)—15.7 percent of the OEF/OIF deployed Veterans screened positive for PTSD, and 10.9 percent of Veterans who did not deploy to OEF/OIF screened positive. This suggests that PTSD is a health concern for both deployed and non-deployed Veterans.



GET HELP

Veterans who have experienced a traumatic event and symptoms lasting longer than four weeks, causing great distress, or disrupting work or home life, may have PTSD. Visit www.ptsd.va.gov for support and resources on PTSD.

If you are concerned about respiratory health, infertility, or other health issues, you can talk to your health care provider or local VA Environmental Health Coordinator (www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp). VA offers a variety of health care benefits to eligible Veterans, including infertility evaluations and some treatment. ★



USING THE VETERANS CHOICE PROGRAM: RESOURCES TO HELP ADDRESS EXPOSURE CONCERNS WITH PROVIDERS OUTSIDE VA

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questions about the health effects of military exposures and exposure-related benefits and services. The app is available for free download from the Apple iTunes store, and will be available for Android devices later in 2015. To learn more about the app, visit mobile.va.gov/app/exposure-ed.

ENVIRONMENTAL MEDICINE CLINICAL CONSULT SERVICE

The U.S. Army Public Health Command offers provider-to-provider service for military, VA, and civilian healthcare providers through its Environmental Medicine Clinical Consult Service. The program helps

providers address health concerns related to military exposures. More information on the program is available at <http://phc.amedd.army.mil/organization/hq/doem/Pages/EnvMed.aspx>.

ENVIRONMENTAL EXPOSURES POCKET CARD

VA has developed a pocket card that can serve as a quick guide for providers caring for patients with environmental exposure concerns. The pocket card includes tips on how to discuss exposure concerns with Veterans, how to create a care plan, and where to go for more information. The pocket card can be printed and shared with providers at your next appointment. For a copy, visit www.publichealth.va.gov/docs/exposures/environmental-exposure-pocket-card.pdf.

LEARN MORE

Learn more about military exposures at www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures.

For more information on the Veterans Choice Program, and to find out if you are eligible, you can visit www.va.gov/opa/choiceact or call **866-606-8198**. Using the Veterans Choice Program does not impact your existing VA health care or any other VA benefit. ★

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