

POST-9/11 VET NEWSLETTER

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

MENTAL HEALTH AMONG MEN AND WOMEN AFTER MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA



U.S. Marines stand at parade rest during a graduation ceremony.

VA is committed to understanding the health effects of military sexual trauma (MST) and providing resources for Veterans who have experienced it. MST is sexual harassment or sexual assault that happens during military service. It can happen to both men and women, and can continue to affect Veterans after they leave the military.

Since 2002, VA has conducted MST screening for all Veterans using VA health care. Among recent Veterans who responded to the “National Health Study for a New Generation of U.S. Veterans” survey, including those who used VA health care and those

who did not, 41% of women and 4% of men screened positive for MST.

Research on MST and Mental Health

VA conducted the “National Health Study for a New Generation of U.S. Veterans” survey study of 20,563 Veterans, including those deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) or Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and non-deployed Veterans. Researchers looked at responses to MST clinical screening questions and compared the differences in depression, anxiety, alcohol abuse, and post-traumatic stress

IN THIS ISSUE

- Military Sexual Trauma
- Qarmat Ali
- My HealtheVet
- Burn Pit Registry Participation
- Chemical Warfare Agents
- Health Effects of Burn Pits
- Airborne Hazards Center of Excellence

DID YOU SERVE AT QARMAT ALI?

During the spring and summer of 2003, approximately one thousand U.S. Servicemembers, including National Guard, Reserve, and active duty soldiers, guarded the Qarmat Ali Water Treatment Facility in the Basrah oil fields in Iraq. Those Servicemembers may have been exposed to toxic hexavalent chromium from exposure to sodium dichromate dust.

Hexavalent chromium is a chemical known to cause lung cancer and other medical conditions, including nasal and skin irritations and respiratory problems. It is only produced through industrial processes for specific

continued on page 2

continued on page 3



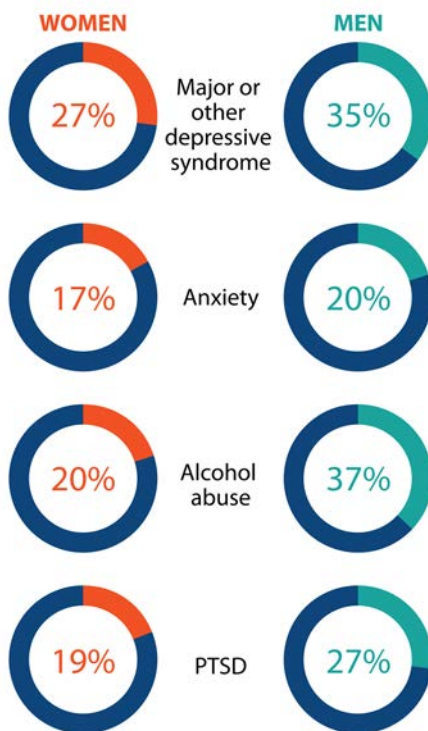
PIONEERING EFFORTS TO UNDERSTAND HEALTH EFFECTS OF AIRBORNE HAZARDS

continued from page 1

disorder (PTSD) among men and women with MST.¹

Overall, researchers found that men had a higher prevalence of mental health conditions compared to women. One reason may be that women are more likely to seek treatment for MST.

Those reporting MST also reported:



Get Help

VA offers a variety of resources to help male and female Veterans who have experienced MST. The

¹ Barth SK, Dursa EK, Bossarte RM, Schneiderman AI. Sex differences in recent mental health disorders among military sexual trauma victims using data from a national Veteran health survey. Poster session presented at: Women's Health 2016: The 24th Annual Congress; 2016 April 16; Arlington, VA.

condition does not need to be service connected. Treatment is free and there are no time limits on eligibility. Veterans do not need to have reported an incident or have documentation that it happened.

- Learn about VA services and benefits for Veterans who have experienced MST, including treatment, recovery services, and other resources at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp.
- An overview of all VA services can be found in the fact sheet "Quick Facts About VA's Health Care Services for Military Sexual Trauma (MST)," available at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/mst/VA_Health_Care_Services_MST_May_2016.pdf.
- For help with treatment and health care, ask to speak to the MST Coordinator at your local VA medical center. Some Vet Centers across the country also offer MST counseling. Find your local VA medical center or Vet Center at www.va.gov/directory/guide.
- Call VA's general information hotline at 1-800-827-1000 for information on VA benefits.
- To learn about other research findings on MST in recent Veterans visit www.publichealth.va.gov/epidemiology/studies/new-generation/military-sexual-trauma-infographic.asp. ★

MY HEALTHEVET: VETERAN CARE MADE EASY



Find out how these Veterans are using My HealtheVet to proactively manage their health – watch a short video at <http://explore.va.gov/video/health-care-myhealthevet>.

My HealtheVet, VA's online personal health record, is a free tool to help Veterans take charge of their health care. MyHealtheVet allows Veterans to:

- **Access and Manage Medical Records:** Veterans can quickly access and manage their VA medical records online and keep track of test results.
- **Refill Prescriptions and Track Delivery:** My HealtheVet's prescription refill feature allows Veterans to request a refill online and track prescription deliveries. Veterans can also find a history of their VA prescriptions and detailed information on active medications.

continued on page 3



MY HEALTHEVET: VETERAN CARE MADE EASY

continued from page 2



A Veterans Affairs employee assists an Inactive Ready Reserve Marine in registering for My HealtheVet at the Palo Alto VA Medical Center.

- **Communicate with VA health care providers and view appointments:** My HealtheVet's Secure Messaging feature gives Veterans a safe and convenient way to communicate online with their VA health care provider between appointments. Veterans can talk about their health, follow-up care instructions, medications, lab results, and other routine questions. Veterans can also view upcoming VA appointments.

Not a My HealtheVet User? Register today at www.myhealth.va.gov. ★

DID YOU SERVE AT QARMAT ALI?

continued from page 1

purposes. At the Qarmat Ali Water Treatment Facility, the chromium was used as an anti-corrosive for the water pipes, and was found on the ground after bags of the chemical were opened at the site.

VA Qarmat Ali Medical Surveillance Program

In an effort to monitor the health of Veterans who may have been exposed to hexavalent chromium at the Qarmat Ali Water Treatment Facility, VA established the Qarmat Ali Medical Surveillance Program. Under the program, VA provides medical screenings free of any charge or copay.

Veterans who participate in the program may receive an exam including:

- Complete physical exam with emphasis on the ears, nose and throat, lungs, and skin
- Pulmonary function tests

VA does not expect to find many serious Qarmat Ali-related illnesses. If any abnormalities are found, participants will be referred to the proper medical specialist.

Take Action Today

If you served at the Qarmat Ali Water Treatment Facility, contact your local Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn (OEF/OIF/OND) Program Manager to make an appointment to enroll in the VA Qarmat Ali Medical Surveillance Program or to schedule your follow-up exam. To find your local OEF/OIF/OND program office visit www.oefoif.va.gov/map.asp. Eligible Veterans may also be contacted directly by VA regarding their participation.

To learn more visit www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/qarmat-ali. ★

If you served at the Qarmat Ali Water Treatment Facility, VA strongly encourages you to participate in the VA Qarmat Ali Medical Surveillance Program, even if you are not currently experiencing any symptoms. Your participation is free and will provide VA with valuable information that could improve care for you and future Veterans. Learn more at www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/qarmat-ali.



MAKE AN IMPACT. JOIN THE BURN PIT REGISTRY.

Participation in the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry has increased by more than 12,000 since March. As of August 21, 2016, the total number of participants was 85,566.

Unfortunately, total participation still only represents a fraction of the estimated eligible population of 3.5 million. Participating in the registry can create a snapshot of your health from which to measure changes over time. You can discuss your questionnaire with a knowledgeable health care provider during a free, optional registry evaluation.

Participation also helps VA better understand the effects of environmental exposures on health, leading to improved health care for all Veterans. Make an impact and help yourself and your fellow Veterans by joining the Burn Pit Registry. Learn more about the registry and how to sign up: www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/burnpits/registry.asp.

EXPOSURE TO CHEMICAL WARFARE AGENTS



U.S. Army Pfc. Bittner, left, and U.S. Navy Petty Officer 3rd Class Ashley North use tape to wrap detonation cord during weapons and explosives training.

Photo credit: Lt. Chad A. Dulac, U.S. Navy

Servicemembers who handled or demolished explosive ordnances during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation New Dawn (OND)

may have been exposed to toxic chemical warfare agents (CWAs), such as mustard agents or sarin, and may experience related health effects. VA and the Department of Defense (DoD) are working to identify and contact active duty Servicemembers and Veterans who may have been exposed to CWAs.

If you believe you may have been exposed to CWAs and have not already 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.

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

ASSESSMENT OF THE VA AIRBORNE HAZARDS AND OPEN BURN PIT REGISTRY



The use of burn pits, area devoted to open-air combustion of trash, was a common waste disposal practice at military sites outside the United States, such as in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Health and Medicine Division (HMD), formerly known as the Institute of Medicine, of the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (the Academies) will release a new report later this year on the VA Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry. The report will include recommendations on collecting, maintaining, and monitoring information collected by the registry. The Academies are private, nonprofit institutions that provide analysis and advice, and operate under a congressional charter.

For more information and to read other reports, visit www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/burnpits/health-effects-studies.asp. ★



AIRBORNE HAZARDS CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

Pioneering Efforts to Understand Health Effects of Airborne Hazards



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Alexis Castillo watches as unused mortar 'cheese' charges are disposed by fire during a mortar training exercise with Iraqi soldiers.

Photo Credit: Sgt. Gustavo Olgiati, U.S. Army

The Airborne Hazards Center of Excellence (AHCE) at the New Jersey War Related Illness and Injury Study Center (WRIISC) helps Veterans and VA to better understand the potential health effects of airborne hazards exposure. For Veterans, the AHCE provides comprehensive medical evaluations of symptoms related to airborne hazards exposures. The AHCE also conducts cutting edge research and shares the most recent, up-to-date research findings and education throughout VA.

Specialty Care

If you are a Veteran with airborne hazards concerns, you can first see your local health care teams, and you may be referred for specialty consultations. If you have additional health questions, your VA provider can refer you to be evaluated at the AHCE. The AHCE provides comprehensive, multi-disciplinary, specialty evaluation not available at most VA facilities. They provide a thorough examination with a pulmonologist (lung health doctor) who specializes in airborne hazards, and an extensive environmental exposure assessment. The evaluation may also include assessments of lung function and exercise ability. The AHCE uses its findings and your past medical history to make recommendations to improve your quality of life and manage your symptoms. It shares these recommendations with you and your referring provider for follow-up care.

Cutting Edge Research

Veterans who volunteer for AHCE studies help researchers understand the effects of airborne hazards exposure. The AHCE conducts studies involving many of the same tests used in specialty care for Veterans, including assessment of resting

and exercise gas exchange and cardiopulmonary function. In addition, researchers are also investigating the impact of airborne hazards exposure on cellular bioenergetics and cardiovascular neural control.

ACHE medical professionals also present research and clinical findings at conferences and symposiums with researchers at VA, Department of Defense (DoD), and other leading academic institutions. The AHCE publishes research findings in peer-reviewed journals and creates a variety of educational products.

For more information about the WRIISC, the AHCE enhanced evaluation for airborne hazard concerns, and AHCE research and education efforts, visit www.warrelatedillness.va.gov. ★

The AHCE is an important part of VA's efforts to improve the health of Veterans with airborne hazards concerns along with the VA Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry.

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
Patient Care Services

VISIT US WWW.PUBLICHEALTH.VA.GOV



SUBSCRIBE TO RECEIVE EMAIL UPDATES
AT WWW.PUBLICHEALTH.VA.GOV



FACEBOOK.COM/VETERANSHEALTH



TWITTER.COM/VETERANSHEALTH