

Ionizing Radiation Review

Information for Veterans Exposed to Ionizing Radiation and Their Families

New Study of Atomic Veterans Who Participated in Above-Ground Nuclear Testing

A new research proposal, “Cancer Mortality among Military Participants at U.S. Nuclear Weapons Tests (The Seven Series Study),” has been accepted for funding by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Dr. Han Kang, Senior Scientist in VA’s Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards, is one of the lead investigators.

Over 200,000 military personnel participated in U.S. atmospheric nuclear weapons tests from 1945 until the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1963. This new follow-up of 120,000 participants is planned with the cooperation of the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The goal of the study is to provide quantitative information on the cancer risks of U.S. military personnel

who participated during the testing of nuclear weapons, and to provide one of the first quantitative assessments of the risk of inhaled or ingested radioactive substances known as radionuclides.

The results from this study will serve Veterans by providing important scientific understanding of the level of lifetime risks possible from low-level radiation exposure. This can occur during occupational circumstances, medical imaging examinations, environmental cleanups, nuclear waste disposal, and dirty bomb attacks.

For updates and other information about the study, go to www.publichealth.va.gov/research/epidemiology/research_studies.asp#nuclear.

VA Recognizes the Importance of Veteran Caregivers



VA is rolling out a variety of programs for Veteran caregivers in 2011. These include a Caregiver Helpline, a comprehensive caregiver Web site, and a variety of caregiver support and training programs.

“Caregivers are the family members and loved ones who take care of the severely injured Veterans who need assistance on a daily basis,” said VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki. “These mothers, wives, fathers, husbands, and other loved ones make tremendous sacrifices to be there every day for the Veterans who served this Nation. They are our partners in Veteran health care and they deserve our support.”

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The new caregiver benefits will add to the range of compassionate and practical programs for Veteran caregivers currently available from VA:

- ***In-home and community-based care:*** This includes skilled home health care, homemaker home health aide services, community adult day health care, and home-based primary care.
- ***Respite care:*** Designed to temporarily relieve the family caregiver from caring for a chronically ill, injured, or disabled Veteran at home, respite services can include in-home care, a short stay in a VA community living center or other institutional setting, or adult day health care.
- ***Caregiver education and training programs:*** VA provides multiple training opportunities that include pre-discharge care instruction and specialized caregiver programs such as polytrauma and traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury/disorders, and blind rehabilitation.
- ***Family support services:*** These support services can be face to face or on the telephone. They include family counseling, spiritual, and pastoral care. VA Polytrauma Centers also offer family leisure

and recreational activities and temporary lodging in Fisher Houses.

- ***Other benefits:*** VA provides durable medical equipment and prosthetic and sensory aides to improve function, financial assistance with home modification to improve access and mobility, and transportation assistance for some Veterans to and from medical appointments.

To access these caregiver programs, contact the Caregiver Support Coordinator at the nearest VA Medical Center (VAMC). A directory of VAMCs is available online at www.va.gov/directory.

For additional caregiver information and resources, go to www.caregiver.va.gov.

VA also has a caregiver assistance Web page on My HealtheVet. To access the page:

- go to www.myhealth.va.gov
- in the upper right corner, select “Search Current Site Only” from the drop-down menu
- in the search window, type in “caregiver assistance” and click the “Search” button.

ABOUT THE IONIZING RADIATION REVIEW

The **Ionizing Radiation Review** is produced by VA's Radiation and Physical Exposures Service to provide information to Veterans who may have been exposed to ionizing radiation during their military service.

The newsletter provides information to Veterans and their families concerned about the health risks of exposure to ionizing radiation in military service and about VA's programs to respond to these risks.

This issue was completed in February 2011, and does not include developments that occurred after that time. For past issues of the newsletter and other information, see the Web site available at www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/radiation.

Questions, comments, and suggestions for future issues are encouraged and can be sent to Editor, **Ionizing Radiation Review**, Radiation and Physical Exposures Service (132), VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420.

WWII Veteran and VA Volunteer — Still Helping at Age 91



Volunteer Betty Rose at her duty station. She is also a WWII Veteran.

Meet Betty Rose. She is a Veteran, she is a volunteer, and she is 91 years old.

The year she was born, Woodrow Wilson was President of the United States, gasoline was 26 cents a gallon, and Congress approved the 19th amendment, giving women the right to vote.

Rose's impressive volunteer career began at the age of 24, when

she enlisted in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, which later became the Women's Army Corps. She served at Fort Sill, OK.

Today, 67 years later, she volunteers every Wednesday at the VA Medical Center in Battle Creek, MI, in the

ambassador program. She serves coffee and cookies to outpatients and their family members, gives directions, answers questions, and makes Veterans feel welcome while they wait for their appointments.

She does all this even though she is legally blind and can barely see the faces of the Veterans she is helping.

Why?

"It's like sunshine for me," she said. "I like what the Veterans have done for our country. Paying them back fulfills me."

Betty Rose is truly a remarkable person and a testament to what volunteerism is all about. It is impossible to calculate the number of people she has touched over the years. One way to gauge her service: every time she walks into the waiting room, Veterans smile.

For information about VA's volunteer program, visit www.volunteer.va.gov.

VBDR Announces 2011 Public Meeting

The Veterans' Advisory Board on Dose Reconstruction (VBDR) has held 10 public meetings since its inception. Veterans' input at these meetings has helped the Board with its deliberations and recommendations to VA and the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA). Veterans have testified about their illnesses and problems with DTRA dose reconstructions and VA claims decisions.

The VBDR was established in 2005 by the Secretaries of Defense and Veterans Affairs. The Board provides suggestions for improvements in dose reconstruction and claims compensation procedures for Veterans who may have conditions related to inservice ionizing radiation exposure as Atomic Veterans, that is, Veterans who participated in the atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons from 1945 to 1962, were prisoners of war in

Japan in World War II, or were stationed in Hiroshima or Nagasaki, Japan, from August 1945 to July 1946..

The next VBDR meeting will be held March 11, 2011, in Arlington, VA.

Veterans' Advisory Board on Dose Reconstruction (VBDR) Spring 2011 Public Meeting

March 11, 2011
Hilton Arlington (Ballston Metro)
950 North Stafford Street
Arlington, VA 22203

For more information, call **1-866-657-VBDR (8237)** or visit www.VBDR.org.

Free Health Registry Evaluation for Veterans Exposed to Ionizing Radiation

VA maintains a health registry evaluation program to track the health of Veterans exposed to ionizing radiation during military service. VA offers the evaluation, known as the Ionizing Radiation Registry (IRR), to all eligible Veterans (see requirements in the box at right).

The IRR health evaluation is available free of charge to all eligible Veterans. Veterans do not need to be enrolled in VA health care to be eligible. The evaluation provides Veterans with:

- A free, specialized health evaluation that may include a medical history, lab tests, or a physical exam;
- Answers to questions about environmental exposures;
- Information about health care and other VA benefits;
- Evaluation and any test results shared and maintained in VA medical records.

If new health problems emerge after the initial evaluation, free follow-up evaluations are also available.

To schedule an evaluation, contact an Environmental Health (EH) Coordinator at any VA medical facility. A listing of EH Coordinators is available online at www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp. Information is also available through VA's special health issues helpline at **1-800-749-8387**.

***Note:** A registry evaluation is not a claim for VA benefits nor is it required to receive benefits.*

Ionizing Radiation Registry (IRR) Eligibility Criteria

Veterans can qualify for the IRR if they were exposed to radiation during military service in a “radiation-risk activity,” defined as:

- “Atomic Veterans,” an unofficial term that refers to:
 - Participation in the occupation of Hiroshima or Nagasaki from August 6, 1945 through July 1, 1946;
 - Internment as a Prisoner of War (POW) in Japan during World War II;
 - Onsite participation in a test involving the atmospheric detonation of a nuclear device, whether or not the testing nation was the United States.
- In addition, VA regulations provide that “radiation-risk activity” also refers to:
 - Service at Department of Energy gaseous diffusion plants at Paducah, KY, Portsmouth, OH, or the K25 area at Oak Ridge, TN, for at least 250 days before February 1, 1992, under certain conditions;
 - Proximity to “Longshot,” “Milrow,” or “Cannikin” underground nuclear tests at Amchitka Island, AK, before January 1, 1974;
 - Receipt of nasopharyngeal (NP)—nose and throat—radium irradiation treatments while in the active military, naval, or air service.

For more information about the Ionizing Radiation registry evaluation, go to www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/radiation/registry.asp.



VA Benefits and Services for Aging Veterans

VA understands the special health needs of aging Veterans and is dedicated to providing high-quality benefits and services. The information below provides an overview of relevant VA offerings.

VA's Healthy Aging Services

Preventive care and tools to support healthy aging:

- Nutrition and fitness information
- Safe driving evaluations

Screenings, prevention, and treatment for diseases and conditions:

- Heart disease
- High blood pressure and diabetes
- Colon, breast, and gynecological cancer

VA Nursing Home Care

VA-owned and operated nursing homes (known as community living centers) typically admit patients who require short-term care, who need placement for a service-connected disability, or who have a 70 percent or greater service-connected disability. All others are based on available resources (income and availability). Enrollment in VA's health care system is required.

Rehabilitation Services

Available rehabilitation therapies include: physical, occupational, speech-language, exercise, recreational, and vocational. Primary care providers can make referrals for these services.

Home-Based Therapy

Home-based therapy is available and requires both a referral from a primary care provider and documented homebound status.

Patients must meet Medicare income guidelines for home health care and services must be provided through VA's network of hospital-based home health providers.

VA and Hospice Care

In some cases, VA will cover expenses for hospice care. Enrollment in VA's health care system and a referral from the Veteran's primary care provider are required.

End-of-Life Services

VA provides comprehensive end-of-life services to eligible Veterans. Some examples include:

- Advanced directives
- Living wills
- Burial services

For additional information about VA aging benefits, go to www.va.gov/geriatrics or send an e-mail inquiry to seniors@va.gov. For additional information about other VA benefits, go to www.vba.va.gov or www.cem.va.gov or call **1-800-827-1000**.

HEALTH CONDITIONS RECOGNIZED FOR PRESUMPTIVE SERVICE-CONNECTION

The following conditions occurring in certain Veterans exposed to radiation during their military service have been recognized by VA for presumptive service-connection. These are the Veterans described in the box on page 4, except for Veterans who received nasopharyngeal (NP) radium while in service, as these Veterans are eligible for different benefits. Presumptive service-connection means that Veterans with certain types of exposure to ionizing radiation who have one or more of the illnesses listed below are eligible for disability compensation from VA. They do not have to prove that their condition was caused by ionizing radiation to be eligible for disability compensation from VA.

- Leukemia other than chronic lymphocyte leukemia
- Cancer of the thyroid
- Cancer of the breast
- Cancer of the pharynx
- Cancer of the esophagus
- Cancer of the stomach
- Cancer of the small intestine
- Cancer of the pancreas
- Multiple myeloma
- Lymphomas (except Hodgkin's disease)
- Cancer of the bile ducts
- Cancer of the gall bladder
- Primary liver cancer, except if cirrhosis or hepatitis B is indicated
- Cancers of the salivary gland
- Urinary tract cancer (kidney/renal, pelvis, ureter, urinary bladder, and urethra)
- Bronchiolo-alveolar cancer (a rare form of lung cancer)
- Cancer of the bone
- Cancer of the brain
- Cancer of the colon
- Cancer of the lung
- Cancer of the ovary

Note: To be considered for disability compensation, a Veteran must specifically apply for that benefit. Also, participation in the Ionizing Radiation Registry does not automatically constitute an application for compensation benefits.

Disability Compensation from VA

Veterans with service-connected illnesses or injuries may be eligible for monthly payments, called disability compensation. The disability must have been incurred or aggravated during active military service. Furthermore, the military service of the Veteran must have been terminated through separation or discharge under conditions that were other than dishonorable.

Disability compensation varies according to the degree of disability and the number of dependents. Benefits are not subject to Federal or state income tax. Receipt of military retirement pay, disability severance pay, and separation incentive payments, known as SSB and VSI (Special Separation Benefits and Voluntary Separation Incentives), may affect the amount of VA compensation paid.

Disability ratings range from 0 to 100 percent (in increments of 10 percent). For example, in 2011, a Veteran with a disability rating of 10 percent receives \$123 per month; a Veteran with disability rating of 50 percent gets \$770 per month; and a Veteran with no dependents who is totally disabled and evaluated at 100 percent receives \$2,673 monthly.

Veterans with disability ratings between 30 and 100 percent also may be eligible for monthly allowances for eligible dependents. (The amount depends on the disability rating).

A Veteran who is in need of regular aid and attendance of another person (including the Veteran's spouse), or who is permanently housebound may be entitled to additional benefits. VA must make that determination before the Veteran can receive these benefits.

Veterans can apply for VA disability benefits by completing and submitting VA Form 21-526, Veterans Application for Compensation and Pension. Please include the following materials with the application, if available:

- Discharge or separation papers (DD-214 or equivalent).
- Dependency records (marriage and children's birth certificates).
- Medical evidence (doctor and hospital reports).

Apply online through VA's Web site at <http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp>.

Monthly Disability Compensation Rates for 2011


Percent Disabled	No Dependents	Veteran & Spouse
10%	\$123	—
20%	\$243	—
30%	\$376	\$421
40%	\$541	\$601
50%	\$770	\$845
60%	\$974	\$1,064
70%	\$1,228	\$1,333
80%	\$1,427	\$1,547
90%	\$1,604	\$1,739
100%	\$2,673	\$2,823


Other Benefits


In addition to the compensation program described above, individual Veterans may be eligible for the full range of other benefits offered by VA, including education and training, vocational rehabilitation, home loan guaranties, life insurance, pension, burial benefits, and more.

To learn more about VA's programs, Veterans and other interested parties can visit VA's home page at www.va.gov or call **1-800-827-1000**. For additional information on other benefits programs, please check online at www.vba.va.gov/VBA/benefits/factsheets.

Where to Get Help and Additional Information

 VA Health Care Benefits	1-877-222-8387
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 Other VA Benefits Information	1-800-827-1000
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 Ionizing Radiation Information	www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/radiation
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 Nearest VA Medical Center	www.va.gov/directory
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Questions and Answers

Q: *Who should I contact if I need prompt medical treatment for conditions related to exposure to radiation during military service?*

A: Contact the nearest VA Medical Center for eligibility information and possible medical treatment. Atomic Veterans seeking care solely for health problems associated with exposure to ionizing radiation have been assigned to category six in the enrollment priorities system. Call **1-877-222-8387** for information on this subject.

Q: *Who should I contact if have encountered difficulties at a VA Medical Center?*

A: Contact the Patient Advocate or Patient Representative at that facility for assistance in resolving the problem.

Q: *Where can I find additional resources?*

A: The main VA Web site is **www.va.gov**. Also, Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) are some of the many other very helpful resources for Veterans exposed to ionizing radiation. Representatives of various VSOs include:

- The American Legion, **1-800-433-3318**, **www.legion.org**
- Paralyzed Veterans of America, **1-800-424-8200**, **www.pva.org**
- Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, **1-800-VFW-1899**, **www.vfw.org**
- Disabled American Veterans, **1-877-426-2838**, **www.dav.org**
- National Association of Atomic Veterans, **www.naav.com**

VA does not endorse or recommend any specific group over another. Country and State Veteran Service Officers also have been of great help to many military Veterans.



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AND THEIR FAMILIES
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