2024

AGENT ORANGE NEWSLETTER

INFORMATION FOR VIETNAM-ERA VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

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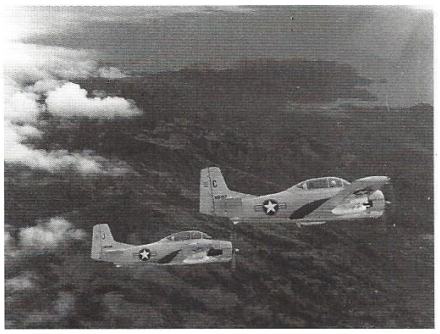
TOXIC EXPOSURE SCREENING

As a Veteran, during your military service, you may have been exposed to environmental hazards, such as Agent Orange. To learn more about your exposures, you can have a toxic exposure screen (TES) (https://www.va.gov/files/2023-01/Toxic%20Exposure%20Screening%20Fast%20Facts%20V1.13.22%201330hrs.pdf#) during a routine health care appointment, which will allow your exposures to be documented in your record. The TES includes a series of questions that take about 5-10 minutes, and the potential exposures to various hazards are recorded. This screening is not



meant for diagnostic purposes but can address concerns about your health and deployment. Following the screen, you will receive information about benefits, environmental health registry exams (https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/benefits/registry-evaluation.asp) and clinical resources to address any concerns. If you have any questions about the TES, you can contact your local VA health care team via Secure Message or call 1-800-MyVA411 and press 8. You can also inquire about the TES during your next VA health care appointment or contact your local VA facility and ask to be screened by the TES Navigator if you want to be screened sooner. It is important to note that you will be screened at least once every five years, even if you do not have any concerns at present. We recommend that you take advantage of this opportunity better understand your health.



VIETNAM-ERA VETERANS, THE PACT ACT AND THE AGENT ORANGE REGISTRY

Do you know the difference between the PACT Act and the Agent Orange Registry? The PACT Act, more formally known as the Sergeant First Class Health Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act, was signed into law on August 10, 2022. It expands health care benefits for Veterans. The Agent Orange Registry helps Veterans understand possible long-term health problems that may be related to Agent Orange exposure. Learn more about the difference between these two initiatives.

The PACT Act

- The PACT Act is a law that empowers VA to provide expanded benefits and care to Veterans who were exposed to environmental hazards during military service.
- It ensures that every Veteran enrolled in VA health care can receive an initial toxic exposure screening at VA and follow-up screening at least every 5 years.

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- It solidifies VA's process for establishing presumptions of service connection of toxic exposure-related conditions.

Presumptive Conditions

The PACT Act added to the list of health conditions that we assume (or "presume") are caused by military exposures. If you have a presumptive condition, you don't need to prove that your service caused the condition. You only need to meet the service requirements for the presumption.

For Vietnam Veterans, the PACT Act added the following presumptive conditions:

- High blood pressure (also called hypertension)
- Monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance (MGUS).

Presumptive Locations

The PACT Act added 5 locations as additional presumptive locations for Agent Orange exposure:

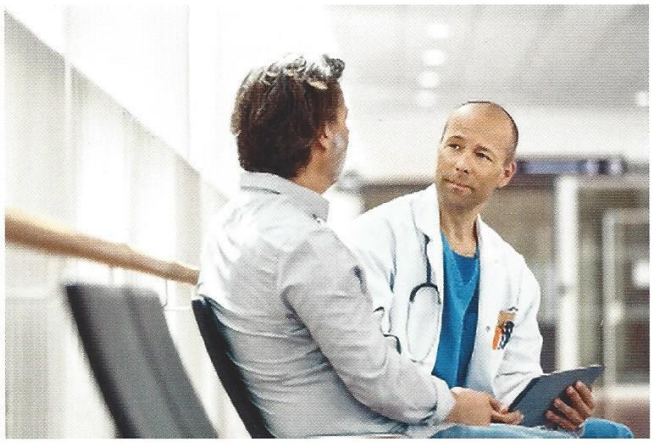
- Any U.S. or Royal Thai military base in Thailand from January 9, 1962, through June 30, 1976
- Laos from December 1, 1965, through September 30, 1969
- Cambodia at Mimot or Krek, Kampong Cham Province from April 16, 1969, through April 30, 1969
- Guam or American Samoa or in the territorial waters off Guam or American Samoa from January 9, 1962, through July 31, 1980
- Johnston Atoll or on a ship that called at Johnston Atoll from January 1, 1972, through September 30, 1977

Find additional locations and time frames (https://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/hazardous-materials-exposure/agent-orange/#full-eligibility-requirements).

If you served on active duty in any of these locations, VA will automatically presume that you had exposure to Agent Orange.

Health Care

If you served on active duty in any of these locations during these time periods, you are eligible to apply for VA health care:



- The Republic of Vietnam between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975
- Thailand at any U.S. or Royal Thai base between January 9, 1962, and June 30, 1976
- Laos between December 1, 1965, and September 30, 1969
- Certain provinces in Cambodia between April 16, 1969, and April 30, 1969
- Guam or American Samoa (or their territorial waters) between January 9, 1962, and July 31, 1980
- Johnston Atoll (or on a ship that called at Johnston Atoll) between January 1, 1972, and September 30, 1977

Learn more about health care eligibility (https://www.va.gov/health-care/eligibility/) and about the PACT Act (https://www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits/#vietnam-era-veteran-eligibility).

Agent Orange Registry

The Agent Orange Registry (https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/benefits/registry-exam.asp) provides eligible Veterans with a free health evaluation related to Agent Orange exposure.

- It alerts Veterans to possible long-term health problems that may be related to Agent Orange exposure during their military service.
- The registry data helps VA understand and monitor the potential for health problems related to Agent Orange exposure.

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- It is not a disability evaluation or required for other VA benefits.
- Enrollment in VA health care is not required to join.

Agent Orange Registry Elilibility

Veterans are eligible for the Agent Orange Registry if they served in the following locations and time frames:

- Vietnam - Veterans who served in Vietnam anytime between 1962 and 1975, regardless of length of time. This includes "Brown Water" and "Blue Water" Navy Veterans.
- Korea - Veterans who served in a unit in or near the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) any time between September 1, 1967, and August 31, 1971.
- Thailand
  - * U.S. Air Force Veterans who served on Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) bases between February 28, 1961, and May 7, 1975.
  - * Army Veterans who provided perimeter security on RTAF bases in Thailand between February 28, 1961, and May 7, 1975.
  - * U.S. Army Veterans who were stationed on some small Army installations in Thailand anytime between February 28, 1961, and May 7, 1975. The Army Veteran must have been a member of a military police (MP) unit or was assigned a military occupational specialty whose duty placed him or her at or near the base perimeter.
- C-123 Airplanes - Veterans (including some Reservists) who state that they flew on or worked on a C-123 aircraft between 1969 and 1986.
- Veterans who served in additional locations added by the PACT Act
- Other Veterans - Veterans who may have been exposed to herbicides during a military operation or as a result of testing, transporting, or spraying herbicides for military purposes.

To schedule a registry evaluation, contact your local VA Environmental Health Coordinator (https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp),

QUESTION: CAN I BE TESTED FOR AGENT ORANGE EXPOSURE?

As a Vietnam-era Veteran, you may wonder if there is an examination or medical test to find out if you have been exposed to Agent Orange. Perhaps you want to know your level of exposure.

If you served during certain times and at particular locations (https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/locations/index.asp), VA presumes that you were exposed to Agent Orange or other herbicides. If you have a presumptive disease (https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/conditions/) and served during the designated time and location, you will automatically be considered eligible for VA benefits. If you feel that you were exposed to Agent Orange or herbicides and have a health condition other than those listed that you believe is related to your exposure, VA encourages you to submit a claim for disability benefits.

Learn more about submitting a claim for disability benefits at www.benefits.va.gov/benefits or call 1-800-827-1000.

WHAT IS EARLY-ONSET PERIPHERAL NEUROPATHY?

Peripheral neuropathy is a condition in which nerves that are outside of the brain or spinal cord are damaged. Signs and symptoms of early-onset peripheral neuropathy include:



- Tingling, prickling, or numbness in the fingers or toes
- Burning, throbbing, or shooting pain that is greater at night and may extend to the hands or feet
- High sensitivity to touch
- Muscular weakness
- Pain that is evenly distributed on both sides of the body (for example, in both hands and feet)

If you are concerned about symptoms of early-onset peripheral neuropathy, consult with your health care provider. If you have early-onset peripheral neuropathy that presents within 1 year of herbicide exposure to a degree that is at least 10% debilitating, VA presumes that your condition is connected to your exposure to Agent Orange or other herbicides during service. You may qualify for disability benefits and medical care.

Learn more about peripheral neuropathy and Agent Orange (https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/conditions/peripheral_neuropathy.asp) Learn about filing a claim for disability benefits at www.benefits.va.gov/benefits or by calling 1-800-827-1000.





Find your advocate for benefits with VA's accredited list of Veteran Service Organizations

Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) are private groups that advocate for Veterans, service members, dependents, and survivors. A VA-accredited VSO can help you understand and apply for VA benefits, or request further review or appeal of an unfavorable VA benefits decision. VA's Office of General Counsel has a search tool to help you find VA-recognized organizations and VA-accredited individuals that you can contact for help with VA benefits claims. Find the tool at https://www.va.gov/ogc/apps/accreditation/index.asp.

THE WOMEN'S OPERATIONAL MILITARY EXPOSURE NETWORK

The War-Related Illness and Injury Study Center in Palo Alto, CA, formed the Women's Operational Military Exposure Network (WOMEN) with a mission to combine a comprehensive clinical care program with cutting-edge research to assess and study the effects of military exposure on women who served. WOMEN's vision is to enhance, educate and promote women Veterans' health by continually asking questions, studying possibilities with proven research techniques, and disseminating findings to scientific and Veteran communities.

Although WOMEN has a strong interest in post-9/11 women Veterans as well as Gulf War era Veterans, it serves women Veterans from all eras. The WOMEN team acknowledges that although women were not authorized to serve in combat during the Vietnam War, most women were exposed to the same trauma and combat environment as their male peers. As it related to Vietnam-era,

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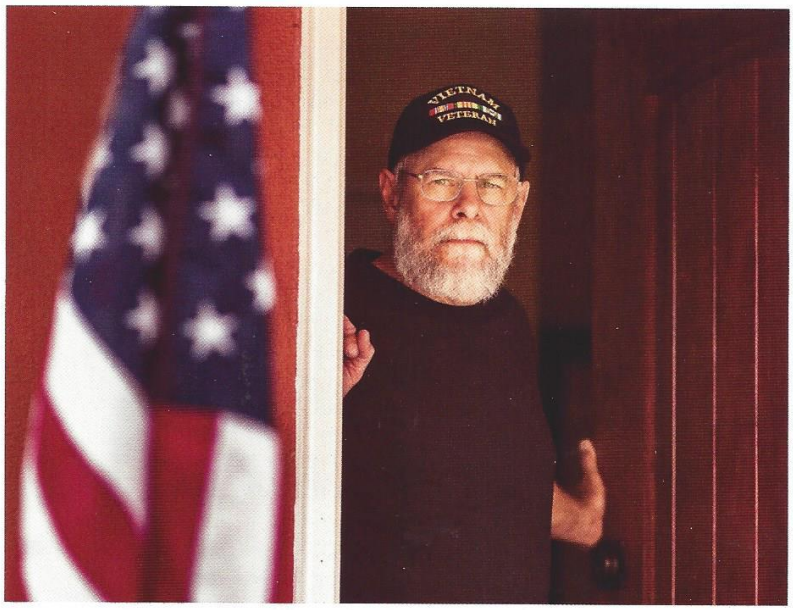
WOMEN is conducting research on menopause and its effect on cognition, especially in the setting of previous traumatic brain injury, and an examination of military exposures and the potential effect on their children's health.



VA HOLDS ANNUAL MILITARY ENVIRONMENTAL EXPOSURES TRAINING CONFERENCE

VA's Health Outcomes Military Exposures (HOME) is committed to educating health care providers about military environmental exposures and their impact on health. As a part of this effort, HOME held its annual Military Environmental Exposures Training Conference July 11-13th, 2023, in St. Louis, MO. This conference provided essential training for VA staff to develop and sustain skills needed to evaluate Veterans with military environmental exposure concerns. Attendees included VA health care providers and staff who care for Veterans with exposure concerns, including environmental health clinicians and coordinators, primary care physicians and other health care providers.

At the conference, attendees received up-to-date information on the requirements and best practices for implementing and conducting military environmental exposure assessments and environmental health registry exams (https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/benefits/registry-evaluation.asp), such as the exam for the Agent Orange Registry (https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/benefits/registry-exam.asp). Additionally, attendees were provided with an overview of the PACT Act (https://www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits/), the toxic exposure screen, and the roles and responsibilities of environmental health coordinators and clinicians. This year, all attendees were required to complete the VA/American College of Preventive Medicine's Military Environmental Exposures Level 1 Certification and obtain an Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record account prior to attending the conference. The certification provided foundational knowledge to effectively identify and treat military environmental exposures that are of concern to Veterans.

The conference included lectures, case studies, breakout sessions, scientific poster displays, and a comprehensive question-and-answer session to test the knowledge of attendees.

TELEPHONE RESOURCES

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1-877-222-8387

Benefits

1-800-827-1000

TDD (Hearing Impaired)

1-800-829-4833

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