

AGENT ORANGE NEWSLETTER

INFORMATION FOR VIETNAM-ERA VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the 2020 issue of the annual Agent Orange Newsletter. This issue covers Agent Orange presumptive conditions; disability compensation for Blue Water Navy Veterans; Agent Orange Registry exams at the El Paso VA Health Care System; research on restrictive pulmonary disease and herbicide exposure; and more. Find past issues of the Agent Orange Newsletter online at <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/publications/newsletter-archive.asp>. For more information for Vietnam-era Veterans, go to <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/index.asp>.

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At the time of publication of this newsletter, the coronavirus (COVID-19) has been affecting the nation. VA is committed to the health and safety of Veterans. During this pandemic, environmental health registry evaluations may be deferred or offered via telehealth. For more information, please contact the Environmental Health Coordinator nearest you, listed at <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp>. Read the latest information on the coronavirus (COVID-19) at <https://www.va.gov/coronavirus/>.



BLUE WATER NAVY VETERANS' DISABILITY CLAIMS BEGAN JAN.1, 2020

by Renee Johnson,
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Did you serve in the offshore waters of the Republic of Vietnam between Jan. 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975? If so, then you're considered a Blue Water Navy (BWN) Veteran, and you may now be eligible for disability compensation and other benefits.

On Jan. 1, 2020, the Blue Water Navy Act of 2019 (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/299/text>) took effect. This Act, signed into law on June 25, 2019, extends the presumption of herbicide exposure, such as Agent Orange, to BWN Veterans who served as far as 12 nautical miles from the shore of the Republic of Vietnam and have since developed one of 14 medical conditions (<https://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/hazardous-materials-exposure/agent-orange/related-diseases/>) related to exposure. Some of these conditions include Type 2 diabetes, Parkinson's disease, many forms of cancer and others. You may now be eligible for disability compensation and other benefits. In addition, if you're a Veteran who served in the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between Sept. 1, 1967, and Aug. 31, 1971, you may also qualify for compensation and benefits for yourself and your family members.



HOW DO I KNOW IF I'M ELIGIBLE FOR DISABILITY COMPENSATION?

You don't need to prove contact with herbicides to be eligible. However, the best way to find out if you're eligible is to work with an accredited claims representative or VA regional office before filing a claim.

HOW DO I FILE A CLAIM FOR COMPENSATION BENEFITS?

If this is your first time filing a VA disability claim, use Form 21-526EZ (https://www.va.gov/vaforms/form_detail.asp?FormNo=21-526EZ), Application for Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits, and learn more about how to file your claim at <https://www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/>.

You can also contact an accredited Veterans Service Organization (VSO) to assist you with your application. Find a list of VA-approved VSOs at <https://www.va.gov/vso/>. You may also contact your state's Veterans agency (<https://www.va.gov/statedva.htm>) for additional assistance with the application process.

WHAT IF I'VE PREVIOUSLY FILED A CLAIM THAT WAS DENIED?

If you filed an herbicide exposure claim that was denied in the past, and it included one or more presumptive conditions, you are urged to file a new claim. VA is also using the new law to automatically review claims currently in the VA review process or under appeal.

When you begin the claims process again, be sure to provide any new or relevant information regarding your claim, such as updated medical information or the dates your vessel traveled through the offshore waters of the Republic of Vietnam.

For re-submitting a claim, use VA Form 20-0995 (https://www.va.gov/vaforms/form_detail.asp?FormNo=20-0995), Decision Review Request: Supplemental Claim.

HOW SHOULD SURVIVORS AND DEPENDENTS APPLY FOR AN INITIAL DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION (DIC) CLAIM FOR A VETERAN WHO DIED OF A PRESUMPTIVE CONDITION?

Eligible survivors and dependents

continued on page 3



must meet certain conditions to receive DIC. If you are eligible, there are several ways to file a claim, including:

- By mail, using VA Form 21P-534EZ (<https://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/VBA-21P-534EZ-ARE.pdf>).
- In person at a VA regional office.
- Through an accredited claims representative or VSO.

To learn more about this process, go to <https://www.va.gov/disability/dependency-indemnity-compensation/>.

WHAT BENEFITS WILL I RECEIVE IF MY CLAIM IS APPROVED?

If you are deemed eligible, you may receive a monthly disability compensation payment and free healthcare related to your disability. The amount of compensation is determined by your diagnosed condition and level of disability.

Another important component of the Blue Water Navy Act includes changes to the VA Home Loan program. VA now allows the “no-down payment” option on guaranteed home loans, regardless of mortgage amount, for all Veterans. In addition, there is a reduction in the funding fee required for Reservists and National Guard borrowers and other changes.

More information and resources on the Blue Water Navy Act, eligibility, how to file a claim, and changes to the VA Home Loan Program can be found online at <https://benefits.va.gov/benefits/blue-water-navy.asp>.

VA RELEASES DOD’S REVISED LIST OF AGENT ORANGE TESTING AND STORAGE LOCATIONS

During the Vietnam era, the U.S. military used Agent Orange and other tactical herbicides for mission-related defoliation in certain environments. These tactical herbicides were tested or stored on some military bases outside of Vietnam, including in the United States.

The Department of Defense (DoD) recently revised its list of these locations by thoroughly reviewing the records for testing, application, transportation, and storage of tactical herbicides outside of Vietnam. This was a long-term collaboration with other government agencies, including VA.

VA posted the new list online at <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/locations/tests-storage/index.asp>. You can

view the list on the web organized by location inside or outside of the U.S. or by date. You can also view a spreadsheet at https://www.publichealth.va.gov/docs/agentorange/dod_herbicides_outside_vietnam.pdf containing all herbicide test and storage locations by location and date.

If your location and time frame is on the list and you were previously denied disability based on herbicide exposure compensation, you can file a supplemental claim at <https://www.va.gov/decision-reviews/supplemental-claim/>.

If you believe you were exposed to Agent Orange or other tactical herbicides and have a condition related to exposure to Agent Orange, you can file a disability claim at <https://www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/>.



barrels of herbicides



RESEARCH ON RESTRICTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE AND HERBICIDE EXPOSURE IN VIETNAM WAR VETERANS

Vietnam War Veterans have expressed concern about chronic lung conditions and a possible connection to herbicide exposure. A study of Army Chemical Corps (ACC) Veterans by VA's Epidemiology Program, Post Deployment Health Services (PDHS), provided new insights about the impact of herbicide exposure on restrictive respiratory disease, a class of chronic lung conditions that reduce a person's ability to expand their lungs when inhaling.

ACC Veterans are an important group to study because these Veterans handled or sprayed tactical herbicides during the Vietnam War and likely had one of the highest levels of herbicide exposure among those who served during that time. For the 468 ACC Veterans in this analysis, researchers reviewed physical examination, medical record, and health survey data from a large study of these Veterans conducted in 2013. Read about this study at <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/epidemiology/studies/vietnam-army-chemical-corps.asp>. As a part of the physical examination, researchers used a spirometer to measure breathing and airflow out of the lungs. Spirometry is just one of a group of objective tests that doctors can use to test how well a person's lungs work. Herbicide exposure was based on whether a Veteran reported being exposed to herbicides.

The prevalence of restrictive lung disease in ACC Veterans who reported spraying herbicides was almost twice that of ACC Veterans who did not report spraying herbicides. However, after considering other Veteran characteristics, such as cigarette smoking and whether a Veteran served in Vietnam or other locations during the War, no statistically significant association was observed between spirometrically-determined restrictive lung disease and herbicide exposure. Researchers observed significant, elevated associations between restrictive lung disease and race/ethnicity and higher waist circumference.

These new results extend PDHS's previously reported findings on lung disease and herbicide exposure. This study also represents the first published research on breathing restriction determined by spirometry in Vietnam War Veterans. Epidemiology Program researchers recommended additional studies on this topic, to include full pulmonary function testing and more targeted research designs.

Read more about the study, "Spirometric Pulmonary Restriction in Herbicide-Exposed U.S. Vietnam War Veterans" at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/31466319>.



x-ray of lungs

AGENT ORANGE PRESUMPTIVE CONDITIONS

If you served in Vietnam and have certain health conditions, VA presumes that these conditions are related to exposure to Agent Orange or other herbicides. VA presumes that the following health problems are related to herbicide exposure:

- AL Amyloidosis
- Chronic B-cell Leukemias
- Chloracne
- Diabetes Mellitus Type 2
- Hodgkin's Disease
- Ischemic Heart Disease
- Multiple Myeloma
- Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma
- Parkinson's Disease
- Peripheral Neuropathy, Early-Onset
- Porphyria Cutanea Tarda
- Prostate Cancer
- Respiratory Cancers
- Soft Tissue Sarcomas

In addition, VA presumes certain birth defects in children of Vietnam and Korea Veterans are associated with Veterans' qualifying military service. Learn more at <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/birth-defects/index.asp>.

Learn more about benefits related to Agent Orange exposure at <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/benefits/index.asp>.



WHAT IS A REGISTRY? VA OFFERS A REGISTRY FOR YOU

VA's Post Deployment Health Services (PDHS) oversees six exposure registries, also called Environmental Health Registries. A registry is defined as a system for collecting and maintaining, in a structured record, data on specific persons from a defined population, which allows for preliminary research analyses and reviews.

Two broad categories of health registries are disease-based registries and exposure-based registries. A disease-based registry organizes data based on the cases of a specific disease or condition, while an exposure registry organizes data based on people who have had a common exposure. For example, a disease-based registry would focus on cases of multiple sclerosis or cancer, while the registry for the World Trade Center 9/11 workers is an exposure registry.

Veterans with service in Vietnam between 1962-1975 may be eligible for the Agent Orange Registry (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/benefits/registry-exam.asp>). This includes Brown Water Navy Veterans who served aboard patrol boats that operated on the inland waterways of Vietnam, Blue Water Navy Veterans who served on a vessel operating not more than 12 nautical miles seaward from the demarcation line of the waters of Vietnam and Cambodia, and certain Veterans who served in Korea or Thailand.

Depending on the time and location of service, Veterans may be eligible for other exposure registries, including:

- The Ionizing Radiation Registry (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/radiation/benefits/registry-exam.asp>)
- The Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/burnpits/registry.asp>)
- The Gulf War Registry (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/gulfwar/benefits/registry-exam.asp>)
- The Depleted Uranium Follow-Up Program (https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/depleted_uranium/followup_program.asp)
- The Toxic Embedded Fragment Surveillance Center (https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/toxic_fragments/index.asp)

The Agent Orange Registry, Ionizing Radiation Registry, Depleted Uranium Follow-Up Program, and Toxic Embedded Fragment Surveillance Center are for specific exposures, while the Gulf War Registry and Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry address a broad spectrum of exposures. For example, airborne hazards-related illnesses can be caused by local air pollution, blowing dust from the desert environment, or smoke from burn pits.

Registries have several advantages. Participants who join and give their contact information provide

a way for VA to reach them with updates. Registries can also be tools for surveillance. Individuals within the registry can be tracked and monitored for health trends within the group. Registries can also generate ideas (hypotheses) for research on associations between exposures and disease.

Self-reported registries, however, have limitations. They are subject to recall bias (misremembering), as the deployment events may have happened several years ago. Self-reported registries also tend to be self-selecting, meaning certain people may be more motivated to participate than others. For example, those with significant health issues may be more likely to participate compared those who consider themselves healthy; therefore, the registry data may not represent the actual health of the population. Also, registry information can be used in research studies but are not usually studies in themselves. Finally, participation in a registry does not suffice for a compensation and pension examination and is not required to submit a compensation claim.

Veterans who are interested in joining a registry should contact their local Environmental Health Coordinator, found at <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp>. Find more information about registries from VA's PDHS at <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/benefits/registry-evaluation.asp>.



AGENT ORANGE REGISTRY EXAMS AT THE EL PASO VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

VA's Agent Orange Registry offers Veterans who served in Vietnam between 1962-1975 the opportunity to learn about possible health problems that may be related to Agent Orange exposure. The Agent Orange Registry health exam is free and includes an exposure history, medical history, physical exam, and tests, if needed.

At the El Paso VA Health Care System, Mojgan Kaveh-Talley, MD has been working as an Environmental Health Clinician, conducting Agent Orange Registry exams since 2015. Dr. Kaveh-Talley is a physician in occupational and environmental health medicine and a lead physician for the Military Environmental Medicine Clinic at her medical center. Her clinic has conducted 8,319 Agent Orange Registry exams through January 2020.

At Dr. Kaveh-Talley's clinic, Agent Orange Registry exams take roughly one hour to complete.

Some of the health concerns that Veterans report during the exams include diabetes mellitus type 2, ischemic heart disease, Parkinson's disease, early-onset peripheral neuropathy, and prostate cancer.

"What I like most about conducting Agent Orange Registry exams is finding presumptive conditions related to Agent Orange that have been missed by patients' main providers," said Dr. Kaveh-Talley.

"Every day, it is rewarding, as patients are so thankful and appreciative," she added.

Besides helping individual Veterans, the registry also helps VA to better understand and respond to Vietnam Veterans' health care needs as a group. Veterans should note that the registry exam is separate from a disability exam and not required for

VA benefits. Veterans do not need to be enrolled in VA health care to participate in the Agent Orange Registry.

To schedule an exam, Veterans usually call a medical support assistant at the El Paso VA Health Care System. You can schedule an Agent Orange Registry exam nearest you by contacting your local Environmental Health Coordinator at <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp>.



Mojgan Kaveh-Talley, MD

ELIGIBILITY FOR THE AGENT ORANGE REGISTRY

Veterans are eligible for the Agent Orange Registry health exam if they served in Vietnam between 1962-1975, including:

- Veterans who served aboard patrol boats that operated on the inland waterways of Vietnam (Brown Water Veterans)
- Veterans who served on a vessel operating not more than 12 nautical miles seaward from the demarcation line of the waters of Vietnam and Cambodia (Blue Water Navy Veterans)
- Certain Veterans who served in Korea or Thailand



AGENT ORANGE AND INTERGENERATIONAL EFFECTS

Vietnam Veterans have had concerns about the health effects of Agent Orange and other tactical herbicides on future generations. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM), an independent, non-governmental organization, has an agreement with VA to review the latest scientific literature on the long-term health effects of Agent Orange and other herbicides on Vietnam Veterans and to report findings. In the most recent report, *Veterans and Agent Orange: Update 11 (2018)* (<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/25137/veterans-and-agent-orange-update-11-2018>) NASEM concluded that there is inadequate or insufficient evidence of birth defects in the descendants of Vietnam Veterans resulting from tactical herbicide exposure. In the previous report, *Veterans and Agent Orange: Update 2014 (2016)* (<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/21845/veterans-and-agent-orange-update-2014>), NASEM also found inadequate or insufficient evidence between birth defects, including spina bifida, with a parents' potential exposure to Agent Orange or other herbicides.

Despite NASEM's findings, spina bifida (with the exception of spina bifida occulta), is currently covered for any dependent of a Vietnam Veteran (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/birth-defects/spina-bifida.asp>). In addition, some birth defects are covered for women Veterans (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/>

[agentorange/birth-defects/children-women-vietnam-vets.asp](https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/birth-defects/children-women-vietnam-vets.asp)).

Learn more about benefits for children with birth defects and how to apply at <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/benefits/children-birth-defects.asp>.

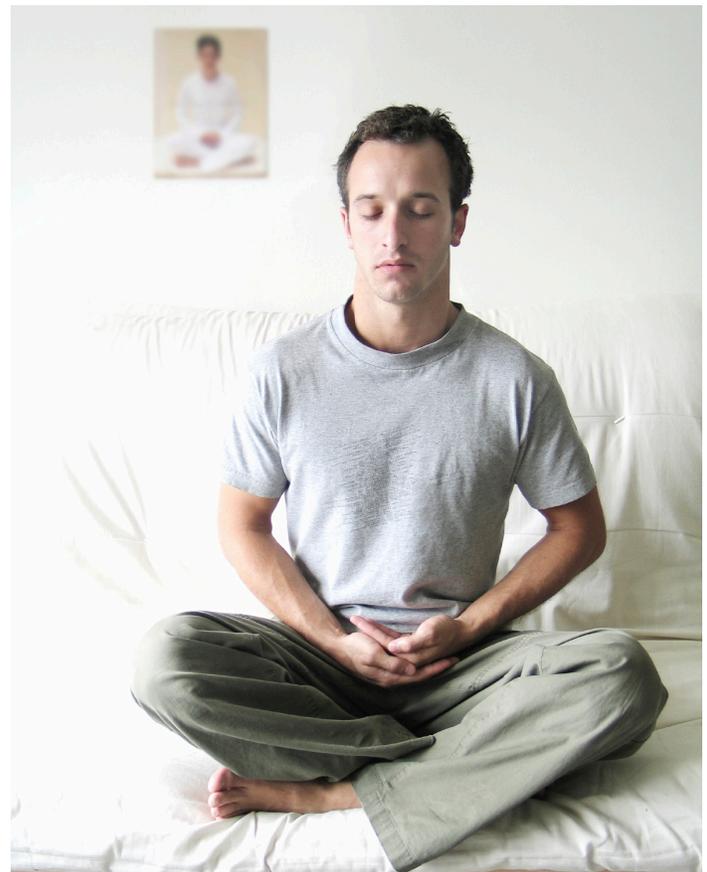
MINDFULNESS-BASED STRESS REDUCTION CLASSES AVAILABLE BY PHONE FOR VETERANS

A free, phone-based program called "Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction" is available to Veterans of all eras, including Vietnam-era Veterans. Mindfulness meditation has been shown to be effective in treating several health conditions, such as insomnia, anxiety, high blood pressure, chronic pain, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This program complements existing treatments and is safe to participate in while taking prescribed medications or with current exercise plans.

VA's War Related Illness and Injury Study Center (WRIISC) (<https://www.warrelatedillness.va.gov/>) manages this program. The WRIISC begins

each call with a topic related to mindfulness, followed by a guided meditation practice. While the lasting benefits of mindfulness meditation come with regular practice, many Veterans report feeling more relaxed and able to cope with symptoms by the end of each call.

The WRIISC offers an hour-long session on the first two Fridays of each month, from 11am-noon EST. Veterans can call in as many times as they like. The toll-free call-in number is 1-800-767-1750, access code 54220.



ADDRESS CHANGES

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