

# Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation New Dawn

War Related Illness & Injury  
Study Center (WRIISC)

# Objectives

- The purpose of this WRIISC group post-deployment exposure education visit is to:
  - Inform Veterans of potential health hazards that may be related to certain conflicts and military activities
  - Increase Veterans' awareness of VA's post-deployment health resources and activities

# Presentation Outline

Introduction

History: Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn

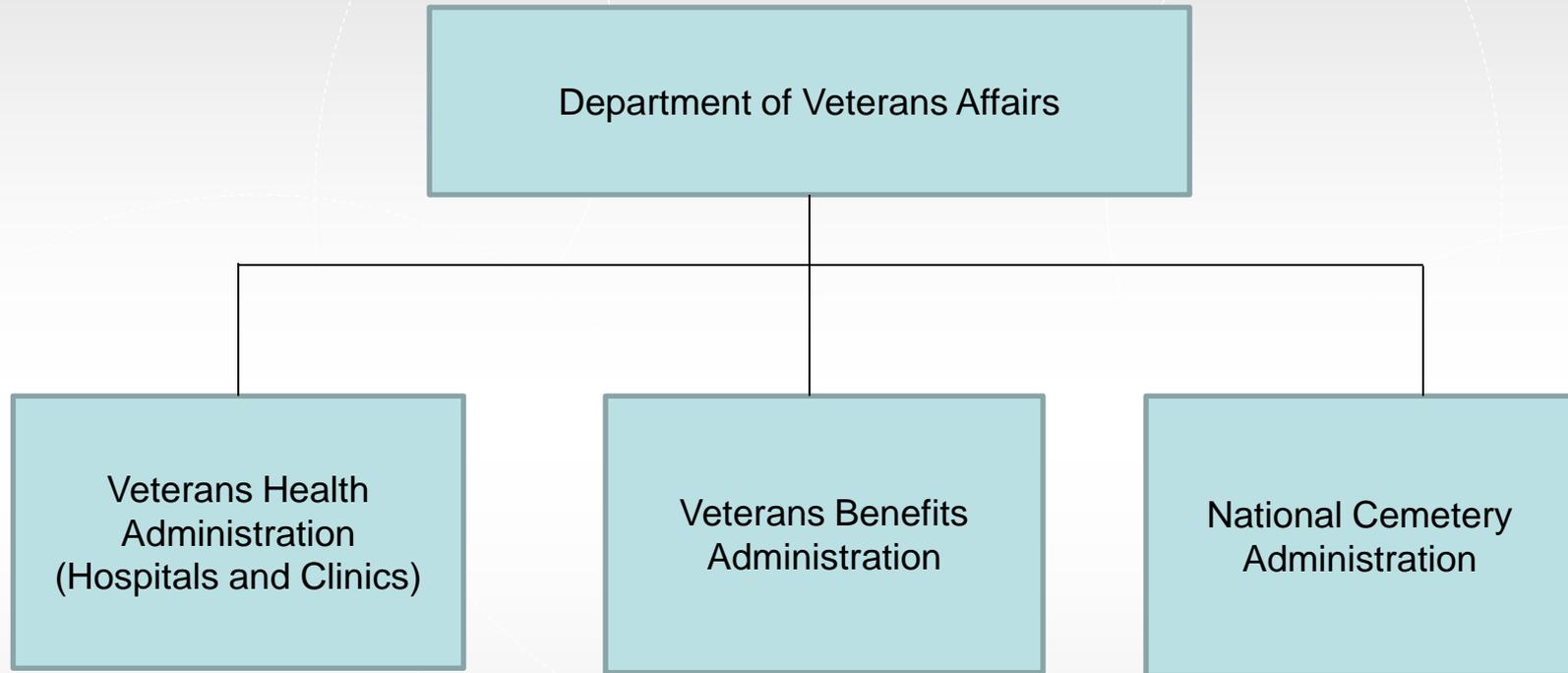
Potential Exposures

Potential Health Effects

VA Health Care

Other VA Resources

# Department of Veterans Affairs



# Who are we at WRIISC?



We are a 2<sup>nd</sup> opinion referral center for combat Veterans with difficult to diagnose illnesses



We provide education to Veterans and health care providers on post-deployment health concerns



We conduct clinical research on issues related to post-deployment and Veterans' health

# Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation New Dawn

- History
  - Service members have been deployed to a number of locales in support of OEF/OIF/OND operations.
  - Operation Enduring Freedom started in October 2001 in response to the 9/11 attacks.
  - Operation Iraqi Freedom started in March 2003 with the invasion of Iraq. Last combat brigade left Iraq August 2010.
  - Operation New Dawn started September 1, 2011.
  - As of September 2013, approximately 1,724,058 OEF/OIF/OND have separated from military service. Approximately 998,004 (58%) have sought care from VA.

REF: [www.defense.gov](http://www.defense.gov) , [www.publichealth.va.gov](http://www.publichealth.va.gov)

# Ground Troops in Afghanistan and Iraq

- The number of service members deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq varied from 2002 to 2012.
- In Afghanistan, average monthly boots on ground reached peak levels of approximately 63,500 from 2010 to 2012. This was an increase from the 2002 levels of approximately 5,200 and 2003 levels of approximately 10,400.
- In Iraq, average monthly boots on ground was approximately 67,700 in 2003. In 2007 and 2008, average monthly boots on ground was approximately 148,300 in 2007 and 157,800 in 2008. As of 2012, approximately 4,100 ground troops were in Iraq.

REF: Joint Chiefs of Staff

# Military Facilities and Locations

- There are over 500 recognized bases in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Some of these bases are no longer used or have been re-named.
- A list of these bases will be included in the upcoming Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry questionnaire.

REF: VA Office of Public Health

# OEF/OIF/OND Potential Exposure Concerns

- As part of the pre-deployment, post-deployment and re-deployment preparation, DoD provides Force Health Protection briefings to Servicemembers discussing potential deployment exposures to inform service members of potential risks.
- Health effects that are related to potential exposures often are classified into two categories: acute health effects and long-term health effects.
- Servicemembers at greatest risk for potential long term health effects are those who were acutely ill at the time of the exposure and/or those who experienced high levels of exposure.

# OEF/OIF/OND Potential Exposure Concerns

- Animal Bites/Rabies
- Anti-malaria medication (Mefloquine)\*
- Asbestos
- Burn Injuries
- Burn pits
- Depleted Uranium
- Harsh living conditions
- Incoming fire, explosive events
- Infections/Multi-drug resistant Acinetobacter
- Injuries, musculoskeletal wear and tear
- Lead
- Loud noises
- Pesticides
- Physical and Mental Stressors
- Sand, Dust, Airborne Particulate Matter
- Vaccinations

REF: [www.publichealth.va.gov](http://www.publichealth.va.gov), WRIICS clinical reports, \*used in OEF and early stages of OIF

# What are presumptions and why do we have them?

- A presumption does not require a case-by-case determination of service connection to a health condition in order for Veterans with that condition to obtain benefits.
- Two-step presumption:

If you were there

- You were exposed



If you were exposed and develop one of the conditions

- It is related to the exposure

# OEF/OIF Associated Conditions

## Infectious Disease:

- VA presumes the following infectious diseases are related to military service in the Southwest Asia theater of operations during the first Gulf War starting August 2, 1990, through the conflict in Iraq and on or after September 19, 2001, in Afghanistan.
- Veterans must have the diseases within the time frames shown here **and** have a current disability as a result of that disease in order to receive disability compensation.

REF: [www.publichealth.va.gov](http://www.publichealth.va.gov)

# OEF/OIF Associated Conditions

## Infectious Disease:

- **Malaria:** An infectious disease caused by a parasite transmitted by mosquitoes. Symptoms include chills, fever, and sweats. It must be at least 10 percent disabling within **one year** from the date of military separation or at a time when standard or accepted treatises indicate that the incubation period began during a qualifying period of military service.
- **Brucellosis:** A bacterial disease with symptoms such as profuse sweating and joint and muscle pain. The illness may be chronic and persist for years. It must be at least 10 percent disabling within **one year** from the date of military separation.
- **Campylobacter Jejuni:** A disease with symptoms such as abdominal pain, diarrhea, and fever. It must be at least 10 percent disabling within **one year** from the date of military separation.

# OEF/OIF Associated Conditions

## Infectious Disease:

- **Coxiella Burnetii (Q Fever):** A bacterial disease with symptoms such as fever, severe headache, and gastrointestinal problems such as nausea and diarrhea. In chronic cases, the illness may cause inflammation of the heart. It must be at least 10 percent disabling within **one year** of the date of military separation.
- **Mycobacterium Tuberculosis:** An illness that primarily affects the lungs and causes symptoms such as chest pain, persistent cough (sometimes bloody), weight loss and fever.
- **Nontyphoid Salmonella:** A condition characterized by symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. It must be at least 10 percent disabling within **one year** of the date of military separation.

REF: [www.publichealth.va.gov](http://www.publichealth.va.gov)

# OEF/OIF Associated Conditions

## Infectious Disease:

- **Shigella:** A condition characterized by symptoms such as fever, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. It must be at least 10 percent disabling within **one year** of the date of military separation.
- **Visceral Leishmaniasis:** A parasitic disease characterized by symptoms such as fever, weight loss, enlargement of the spleen and liver, and anemia. The condition may be fatal if left untreated.
- **West Nile Virus:** A disease spread by mosquitoes characterized by symptoms such as fever, headache, muscle pain or weakness, nausea, and vomiting. Symptoms may range from mild to severe. It must be at least 10 percent disabling within **one year** from the date of military separation.

REF: [www.publichealth.va.gov](http://www.publichealth.va.gov)

# OIF Associated Conditions

## Medically Unexplained Chronic Symptoms:

- Based on laws covering Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm, some Veterans from this conflict experienced medically unexplained chronic symptoms that can include fatigue, headaches, joint pain, indigestion, insomnia, dizziness, respiratory disorders, and memory problems.
- VA refers to these illnesses as "chronic multi-symptom illness" and "undiagnosed illnesses." Prefer not to use the term "Gulf War Syndrome" when referring to medically unexplained symptoms reported by OIF Veterans. Why? Because symptoms often vary widely among Veterans.
- These conditions do not apply to Veterans who served in Afghanistan.

REF: [www.publichealth.va.gov](http://www.publichealth.va.gov), VA Office of Public Health

# OIF Associated Conditions

- VA presumes certain chronic, unexplained symptoms existing for 6 months or more may be related to Persian Gulf service without regard to cause. These "presumptive" illnesses must have appeared during active duty in the Southwest Asia theater of military operations or by **December 31, 2016**, and be at least 10 percent disabling. These illnesses include:
  - **Chronic Fatigue Syndrome**
  - **Fibromyalgia**
  - **Functional gastrointestinal disorders:** An example of this is Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS).
  - **Other Undiagnosed illnesses that are chronic and medically unexplained.**

REF: [www.publichealth.va.gov](http://www.publichealth.va.gov)

# Health Effects

- People respond to environmental exposures differently.
- The risk of developing health effects related to an environmental exposure depends on many factors including:
  - Chemicals to which you were exposed
  - When you were exposed (as a fetus, child, adult)
  - How much exposure you received
  - How long you were exposed
  - Your genes
  - Any other exposures to environmental or occupational hazards you may have encountered during your lifetime
  - Lifestyle choices (diet, tobacco or alcohol use, physical activity level)
  - Illnesses you may have from other causes
  - Medications taken during your lifetime

REF: [www.atsdr.cdc.gov](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov)

# Post-Deployment Health Resources

- There are a number of resources to assist Veterans who have post-deployment health concerns including:
  - Post-deployment Integrated Care Initiative (PDICI): Health care providers integrated with primary care who have post-deployment health expertise
  - Environmental Health Clinicians and Registry Coordinators
  - War Related Illness and Injury Study Center

# Evaluation

- If you have health concerns, it is important to talk to your primary care provider to see what type of work up might be indicated:
  - History and Physical Examination
  - Diagnostic evaluation based on presenting signs and symptoms of Veteran. In some instances, further laboratory or diagnostic testing may be indicated.
  - Limited ability of toxicology tests to confirm remote exposure.
  - Depleted Uranium Test may be indicated



# GW Registry (includes OIF and OND), DU Registry and Upcoming Burn Pit Registry

Why does VA have registries?

How and where do Veterans get on the registries?

What does a Veteran get from a health registry exam?

Can a Veteran repeat the registry examination?

Can Veteran family members receive health registry exams?

# Gulf War Registry (to include OIF and OND Veterans)

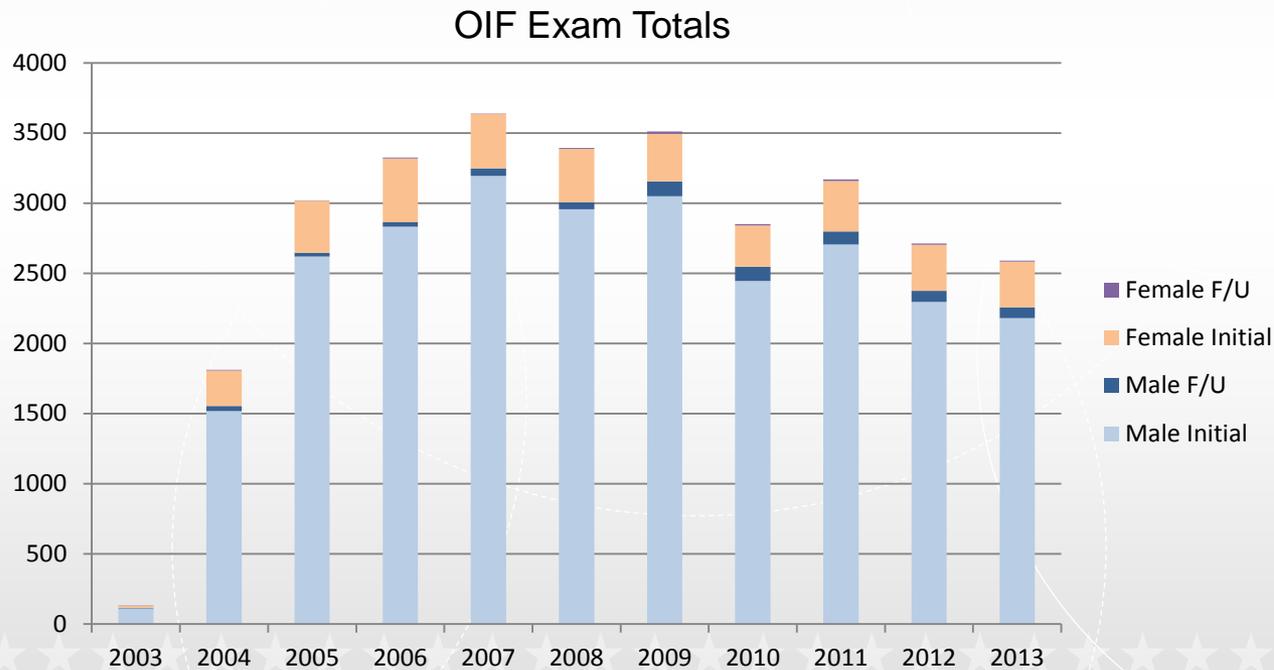
- Eligibility:
  - Veterans who served:
    - in the Gulf during the 1990-1991 Gulf War Operation Desert Shield/ Operation Desert Storm
    - Operation Iraqi Freedom and/or
    - Operation New Dawn

are eligible for the Gulf War Registry examination. You do not need to be enrolled in VA health care to take part.

REF: [www.publichealth.va.gov](http://www.publichealth.va.gov)

# OIF and OND Veterans in GW Registry (29,384 Veterans as of 2/6/2014)

- Free, no-enrollment required
- **Not a compensation examination**
- Does not confirm an environmental exposure
- Provides an opportunity to discuss health concerns with a VA provider with knowledge of military specific exposures
- An outreach tool to connect Veterans with available resources



# Depleted Uranium Follow Up Program

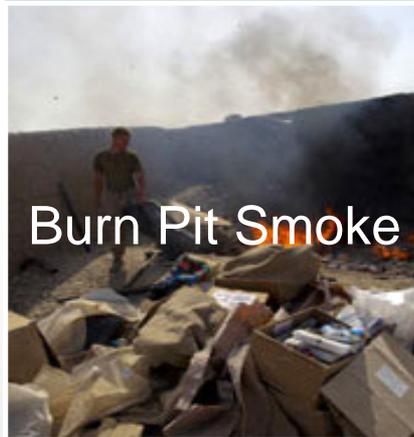
- VA and the Department of Defense established the Depleted Uranium Follow-Up Program at the Baltimore VA Medical Center to screen and monitor Veterans for health problems associated with exposure to depleted uranium (DU). This program is especially geared to Veterans who were on, in or near vehicles hit with "friendly fire"; rescuers entering burning vehicles, and those near burning vehicles; salvaging damaged vehicles; or near fires involving DU munitions.
- VA requires active duty service in any of the conflicts listed to qualify for the DU Follow-Up Program: 1990-1991 Gulf War, Bosnia, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn.
- If a Veteran has health concerns about DU, they can talk to their VA primary care provider or environmental health clinician at their VA medical center to discuss whether a DU urine test or further testing might be indicated. A listing of VA environmental health clinicians can be found at <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp>
- To date, no health problems associated with DU exposure have been found in Veterans exposed to DU. Researchers and clinicians continue to monitor the health of these Veterans.

REF: [www.publichealth.va.gov](http://www.publichealth.va.gov)

Presented by the **VA War Related Illness and Injury Study Center (WRIISC)**

# Burn Pit Registry

## Airborne Hazards



Burn Pit Smoke



Sand & Dust



Other Sources

# Background

- Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, Joint Particulate Matter Work Group 2005, recommended enhanced particulate matter surveillance and epidemiological studies.
- Enhanced particulate matter sampling was conducted every sixth day at fifteen locations throughout Iraq and Afghanistan for 12 months (2006 to 2007)
- National Research Council 2009 review, “it is indeed plausible that exposure to ambient pollution in the Middle East is associated with adverse health outcomes.”
- Joint Base Balad in Iraq, deployment location for many Servicemembers (over 25,000 individuals during 2007 alone)
- DoD Preventive medicine personnel conducted air sampling of emissions from the burn pit to measure particulate matter, volatile organics, metals, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, and polychlorodibenzodioxins/furans (dioxins and furans).

# Institute of Medicine (IOM)

- In response to concerns about potential health effects related to airborne exposures, the VA commissioned the report “Long-Term Health Consequences of Exposure to Burn Pits in Iraq and Afghanistan” from the National Academy of Sciences’ Institute of Medicine. Report was released in Oct 2011.
- This report did not yield conclusive results about the health effects associated with burn pit exposure but recommended further study of the health effects of particulate matter to include respiratory health and cardiovascular disease.

**Conclusion 1:** Limited/Suggestive evidence of an association between exposure to combustion products and reduced pulmonary function in the populations studied; and

**Conclusion 2:** Inadequate/insufficient evidence of an association between exposure to combustion products and cancer, respiratory diseases, circulatory diseases, neurologic diseases, and adverse reproductive and developmental outcomes in the surrogate populations studied.

REF: [www.iom.edu](http://www.iom.edu), VA Office of Public Health

# VA Studies

- VA is analyzing epidemiologic survey data on both Veterans who do and those who do not obtain health care from VA.
  - Analyses are ongoing from the National Health Study for a New Generation of U.S. Veterans.
  - Study compares occurrence of disease (including respiratory diseases) among those deployed to non-deployed Veterans.
- VA produces a quarterly health care utilization report for combat Veterans of OEF/OIF/OND
  - Available on the web at <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/epidemiology/reports/oefoifond/index.asp>

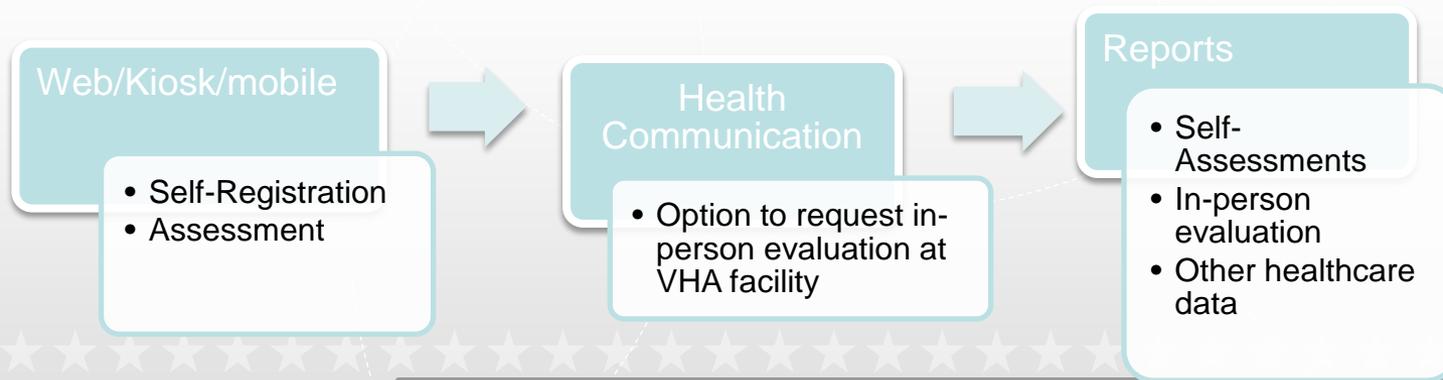
# Key Messages

- The use of burn pits was a common waste disposal practice at military sites in Iraq and Afghanistan. Smoke from these pits contained an unknown mixture of substances that may have short- and long-term health effects, especially for those who were exposed for longer periods or those more prone to health effects such as individuals with asthma or other lung or heart conditions.
- Some Veterans have returned from duty in Iraq, Afghanistan, Djibouti, and the Gulf War with a range of mild to serious respiratory illness possibly associated with exposure to burn pits or other airborne hazards. Along with providing treatment and care for these Veterans, VA is conducting research to monitor and better understand these conditions and their causes.
- Veterans concerned about exposure to open burn pits or other airborne hazards in Iraq and Afghanistan are encouraged to talk to their VA primary care provider. Medical professionals in military exposures and health care benefits are available at many VA medical centers. Veterans and health care providers also can contact the WRIISC.
- VA is creating the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry for Veterans and Servicemembers who deployed to the Southwest Asia theater of operations after August 2, 1990 and for Veterans and Servicemembers who deployed to Afghanistan or Djibouti, Africa after September 11, 2001. VA will use Veteran input and draw from its experience with previous environmental health registries to develop the new web-based questionnaire for Veterans to report exposures and health concerns.
- VA provides disability compensation to Veterans disabled because of injuries or diseases related to their active military service. It is important to note that registry and disability compensation processes are separate and not related.

# Self-Registration Improves Convenience and Access

## Conceptual Design

- Veterans can register via smartphones or tablets but computers are the recommended method.
- Assessment includes health, lifestyle, and activity information
- Option to request in-person evaluation
- Registry participation authorizes VA to report on collective (no identifiers) health care data



# VA Health Care Resources

- OEF/OIF Review Newsletter
  - Sign up for free at:  
<http://www.easmailcall.aac.va.gov/>
  - OEF/OEF Review Newsletter PDF available at  
<http://www.publichealth.va.gov/docs/oefoif/oefoif-newsletter-dec2010.pdf>
- OIF and OND exposure Information
  - <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/wars-operations/iraq-war.asp>
- OEF exposure information
  - <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/wars-operations/oef.asp>
- VA Environmental Health Coordinators
  - <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp>

# VA Health Care Resources

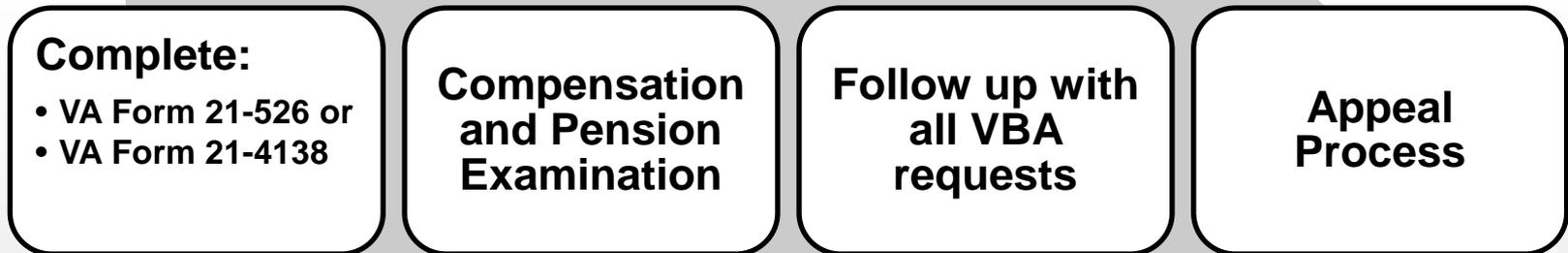
- Gulf War Registry:  
[http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/gulfwar/registry\\_exam.asp](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/gulfwar/registry_exam.asp)
- OEF/OIF/OND Burn Pit Registry:  
<http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/burnpits/action-plan.asp>
- DU Registry:  
[http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/depleted\\_uranium/followup\\_program.asp](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/depleted_uranium/followup_program.asp)
- My HealtheVet
  - <https://www.myhealth.va.gov/index.html>
  - Access Secure Messaging through Premium account

# VA Health Care Resources

- OEF/OIF Website
  - <http://www.oefoif.va.gov/>
  - 5 Years free health care from date of military separation
  - 180 day dental benefit
  - Family support at Vet Centers  
([http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/vetcenter\\_flsh.asp](http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/vetcenter_flsh.asp))
  - Post 9/11 GI Bill (<http://www.gibill.va.gov/>)
  - Job Benefits
  - OEF/OIF Case management
    - OEF/OIF/OND case manager locator:  
<http://www.oefoif.va.gov/map.asp>
    - Caregiver support services:
      - <http://www.caregiver.va.gov/>
      - 1-855-260-3274
    - Crisis Care Hotline 1-800-273-8255 press 1

# VA Benefits Administration

- Compensation and Pension Program
- VA Benefits Process:



REF: [www.benefits.va.gov](http://www.benefits.va.gov)

# Compensation Disability Benefits - FAQs

- Monthly payment rates are based on the Veteran's combined rating for his or her service-connected disabilities. These ratings are based on the severity of the disabilities.
- For presumptive service connected conditions, VA requires:
  - a medical diagnosis of a disease which VA recognizes as being associated with OEF or OIF service,
  - competent evidence of service in OEF or OIF, and
  - competent medical evidence that the disease began within the deadline (if any).
- Under the law, Veterans are eligible for benefits if they served in OEF/OIF and who have a disease that VA recognizes as being associated with this service.
- Survivor benefits may be available.

REF: [www.benefits.va.gov](http://www.benefits.va.gov)

# Compensation Disability Benefits

## Available Resources to Assist with Applications

- VA Web site ([www.benefits.va.gov](http://www.benefits.va.gov))
- File electronically at [www.ebenefits.va.gov](http://www.ebenefits.va.gov)
- Veterans Benefits Administration Counselors
- Veteran Service Organization Counselors
- Vet Centers
- Information on how to apply for VA disability benefits:
  - <http://www.benefits.va.gov/COMPENSATION/claims-postservice-index.asp>
  - [https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits-portal/ebenefits.portal?\\_nfpb=true&\\_nfxr=false&\\_pageLabel=VsoSearch](https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits-portal/ebenefits.portal?_nfpb=true&_nfxr=false&_pageLabel=VsoSearch)

# Important Contact Information

**Veterans Benefits  
Administration:**

1-800-827-1000

ext. 110

[www.benefits.va.gov](http://www.benefits.va.gov)

**DC GW/Burn Pit Registry**

**Ms. Ruby Rauf:**

(202) 745-8419

**Washington, D.C. VAMC  
Appointment Line:**

(202) 745-8577

**Washington D.C.  
WRIISC:**

1-888-722-8340

- Call us to arrange a one-on-one exposure consultation.

# What Now?

- We cannot change exposures that occurred in the past.
- However, there are strategies you can take to help optimize your overall health:
  - Talk to your doctor if you have health concerns
  - Try to prevent future potential exposures
  - Engage in healthy lifestyle choices
    - Regular check-ups
    - Health screenings
    - If you smoke, quit
    - If you drink alcohol, drink in moderation
    - Regular exercise
    - Well-balanced diet
    - Manage stress
    - Good sleep
    - Social supports



## **Our Contact Information:**

# **War Related Illness and Injury Study Center (WRIISC)**

**Email: [wriisc.dc@va.gov](mailto:wriisc.dc@va.gov)**

**Phone: 1-800-722-8340**

**Website: [www.warrelatedillness.va.gov](http://www.warrelatedillness.va.gov)**

# Questions?



Presented by the **VA War Related Illness and Injury Study Center (WRIISC)**