



You can learn more at:

[www.warrelatedillness.va.gov/  
WARRELATEDILLNESS/AHBPCE/  
DRRD\\_Toolkit\\_for\\_Veterans.asp](http://www.warrelatedillness.va.gov/WARRELATEDILLNESS/AHBPCE/DRRD_Toolkit_for_Veterans.asp)



# Deployment Related Respiratory Disease

A Toolkit for Veterans



## What Are Airborne Hazards?

“Airborne hazard” refers to any sort of contaminant or potentially toxic substance that you are exposed to through the air you breathe. During your military service, you may have been exposed to airborne hazards such as:



Airborne Hazards and Burn Pit Exposures - Public Health



Airborne Hazards Concerns: Information - Public Health

- Smoke and fumes from open burn pits
- Chemicals, herbicides, and chemical warfare agents
- Sand, dust, and particulate matter
- General air pollution, common in certain countries
- Fuel, aircraft exhaust, and other mechanical fumes
- Smoke from oil well fires, burning debris, explosions, etc.



### Important:

*If you are experiencing a serious medical problem, such as chest pain or difficulty breathing, call 911!*



## Respiratory Symptoms & Diagnoses

### + Were you exposed?

VA presumes that if you were deployed to certain locations within the Persian Gulf on or after August 2, 1990, then you may have been exposed to airborne hazards. Veterans may have been exposed to airborne hazards in other time periods and locations as well.

### + If you were exposed, will you develop symptoms?

Exposure to airborne hazards may increase the likelihood of your developing a deployment related respiratory disease, but it does not mean you definitely will. Most Veterans who were exposed to airborne hazards do not develop respiratory conditions. All Veterans who are concerned about exposure to burn pits or other airborne hazards should talk to their health care providers.

### + What symptoms should you watch for?

Be aware of any changes to your health, no matter the severity or how ordinary they seem. A few common symptoms following airborne hazard exposure include coughing, burning throat, or itchy skin. You may experience no symptoms, one symptom, or several symptoms that arise long after your exposure. Talk with your healthcare team about any symptoms that occur.

### + What are typical deployment related respiratory symptoms?

Coughing, phlegm, or shortness of breath could be signs of a deployment related respiratory disease.



#### VETERAN TIP

If you were treated for a condition while on active duty, it is still important to talk with your provider about your symptoms, including describing when they first started and any symptoms that are not going away with treatment.



## Assessments & Treatments

### What can you expect from your medical appointment?

There is no specific test for deployment related respiratory disease. Your healthcare provider will work with you to decide what conditions to evaluate based on your symptoms, exposure history, medical history including other health conditions, your family history, and other risk factors.

### What is the treatment for your symptoms?

Based on the test results, your provider may begin a treatment plan. The treatments for respiratory conditions are the same whether or not those conditions are caused by exposure to airborne hazards. That means you receive the same treatment for your asthma or other respiratory conditions as you would if there was no airborne hazard exposure. You can expect your provider to prescribe an evidence-based treatment for your diagnosed condition.



#### VETERAN TIP

The VA may add more presumptive conditions. Be sure to talk with your provider, who can document symptoms and other concerns as they occur.

### What can you do now?

Past exposure to airborne hazards cannot be changed, but additional exposures can be limited. Watch for airborne hazards in your current environment: wear work-related safety equipment such as masks and respirators, limit inhalation of dust and woodsmoke, and if you smoke, consider taking advantage of resources to quit or reduce smoking.

### Are you eligible for benefits?

VA encourages all Veterans to file a claim for compensation and benefits if they have a health condition or symptoms potentially related to their service. Many illnesses have been identified as presumptive conditions. If you have a presumptive condition, you don't have to prove that your service caused the condition. You only need to meet the service requirements for the condition to be eligible for benefits. Regardless of the cause of your symptoms or conditions, your VA health care team is here to care for you.



## Research on Airborne Hazards

There is ongoing research to better understand links between airborne hazards, symptoms, and diagnoses. The following resources about the latest research developments are available online.

- VA's Airborne Hazards & Burn Pits Center of Excellence (AHBPCE)
- Department of Defense, Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs, Toxic Exposures Research Program (TERP)
- VA Office of Research and Development, Military Exposures Research Program (MERP)

Scan the QR to find these resources:



## Resources



#### VETERAN TIP

State Veteran Service Officers can also help with identifying state benefits.

- How to enroll in VA
- Filing a disability claim
- Getting help from a Veterans Service Officer to file a claim
- Talking with a patient advocate
- The PACT Act
- The Airborne Hazards & Open Burn Pit Registry
- Talking with an Environmental Health Coordinator about local services and resources available to address your military exposure concerns
- The VA's Whole Health resources to support your overall health
- Lung health and related topics, including the NIH Breathe Better program

We want you to know that you are not alone. There are VA resources available to help you.

Scan the QR to find these resources:

