

# Pocket Card for Healthcare Professionals



Following the guidance on this card will help you clarify a Veterans' exposure concerns and provide key messages and resources. Clinicians can practice exposure-informed care by:

- Validating and acknowledging Veterans' concerns about military environmental exposures.
- Taking steps to build trust due to the historical context that the government and medical establishment have not always effectively addressed military environmental exposures.
- Providing Veterans resources about military environmental exposures and related conditions, including information on benefits and presumptive conditions.
- Assessing Veterans for military environmental exposure concerns and documenting these concerns.
- Recognizing that all healthcare professionals have a role in serving Veterans with military environmental exposure concerns.
- Having knowledge of military environmental exposures and considering exposures as a possible factor when treating Veterans.

## ASK ALL VETERANS: I'D LIKE TO LEARN ABOUT YOUR MILITARY EXPERIENCE, CAN YOU TELL ME...

When and where did you serve and in what branch?

What type of work did you do while in the service?

Would it be okay if we talked about environmental exposures you experienced in the military?

To the best of your knowledge, did you encounter any of the following? *[refer to the list at the right]*

What precautions were taken? (avoidance, personal protective equipment, treatment)

How were you exposed? (inhaled, on skin, swallowed, etc.)

Where were you exposed? When were you exposed?

Who else may have been affected? Unit name, etc

Would you like assistance with filing for compensation for injuries/illnesses related to your service?

Instruct Veterans to call VA at 1-800-827-1000 or visit [www.va.gov/disability](http://www.va.gov/disability)

### POSSIBLE EXPOSURES TO ASK ABOUT

- Airborne hazards (oil well fires, burn pit smoke, sand and dust storms, etc.)
- Biological hazards (infectious diseases, animal bites, weapons, etc.)
- Chemical hazards (pollution, solvents, fuels, DU, weapons, etc.)
- Physical injury (heat/cold injuries, shell fragment, etc.)
- Prophylactic measures (anthrax vaccine, mefloquine, pyridostigmine bromide pills, etc.)
- Psychological trauma or abuse
- Blast or explosion
- Excessive noise
- Radiation (nuclear weapons handling)

How concerned are you about the exposure?

Do you have medical conditions you feel may be connected to your service?

### TOXIC EXPOSURE SCREENING:

- Veterans enrolled in VA complete a Toxic Exposure Screening at least once every 5 years. The screening asks Veterans if they believe they experienced toxic exposures while serving in the Armed Forces and Veterans' responses are added to the VA medical record. The screening serves as a conversation starter and is a gateway to providing exposure-informed care.
  - Veterans who are not enrolled and meet eligibility requirements will have an opportunity to enroll and receive the screening.

## COMMUNICATE KEY MESSAGES:

- Your health and history of military environmental exposures matter.
- Being exposed to environmental hazards does not necessarily mean you will develop symptoms or a disease.
- Some Veterans do experience long-term health problems

associated with exposure to toxins during their military service. We will continue to follow-up and assess for the presence of exposure-related symptoms over time.

- If you have symptoms or conditions that you believe may be related to your military service, it is important to file a claim for benefits.

## CREATE A CARE PLAN:

### PERFORM A BROAD HEALTH SCREEN.

- 1
  - Exposures may affect any system of the body, but the most common sites are the skin and the nervous, respiratory, and cardiovascular systems.
  - Health conditions that result from exposures are clinically managed in the same way those health conditions are managed when unrelated to exposures.

### DO NOT RULE OUT CURRENT OR LATENT EFFECTS BASED ON ROUTINE LABS.

- 3
  - In some cases, routine labs can indicate moderate or severe effects of an exposure. Depending on the type of hazard and the dose, however, signs and symptoms may be subtle or may not occur until years later and can be nonspecific.

### FOLLOW UP WITH YOUR PATIENT.

- 2
  - Have the patient return periodically for check-ups to monitor their health. The response or lack of response to standard treatments can be an important factor to consider in Veteran patients with possible environmental exposures.

### ENCOURAGE HEALTHY LIVING AND TAKE A WHOLE-HEALTH APPROACH TO TREATMENT.

- 4
  - Advise your patient to incorporate healthier habits into their everyday lives. While the long-term effects of exposures may not be established, eliminating risk factors like smoking and obesity can help prevent the occurrence of significant health issues for many Veterans. For more information about whole health and how to incorporate it into your care plan, visit [Whole Health Home \(va.gov\)](#).

## RESOURCES ON MILITARY ENVIRONMENTAL EXPOSURES:

The following resources may be helpful to provide to a Veteran who has concerns about military environmental exposures:

- Environmental Health and Veteran Exposure Team-Health Outcomes Military Exposures (VET-HOME): Environmental Health and VET-HOME clinicians perform [Environmental Health Registry](#) evaluations and Military Environmental Exposure (MEE) assessments. For more information, Veterans can contact their local [Environmental Health Coordinators - Public Health \(va.gov\)](#) or [VET-HOME](#).
- Exposure Fact Sheets and Newsletters for Veterans:
  - [Publications & Reports on Military Exposures - Public Health \(va.gov\)](#)
  - [Information sheets - War Related Illness and Injury Study Center \(va.gov\)](#)
- Toxic Exposure Screening: [Toxic Exposure Screening Information - War Related Illness and Injury Study Center \(va.gov\)](#)
- VA Benefits Information:
  - [VA Disability Compensation | Veterans Affairs](#)
  - [Exposure To Hazardous Chemicals And Materials | Veterans Affairs \(va.gov\)](#)
  - VA Presumptive Disability Benefits: [presumption.pdf \(va.gov\)](#)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR HEALTHCARE STAFF:

- [Exposure Ed | VA Mobile](#)
- [Public Health Home \(va.gov\)](#)
- [War Related Illness and Injury Study Center Home \(va.gov\)](#)
- [Military Environmental Exposures Certifications | ACPM](#)
- [HOME-WRIISC - Home \(sharepoint.com\) \(Internal VA Staff Only\)](#)