

Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm

War Related Illness & Injury Study Center

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

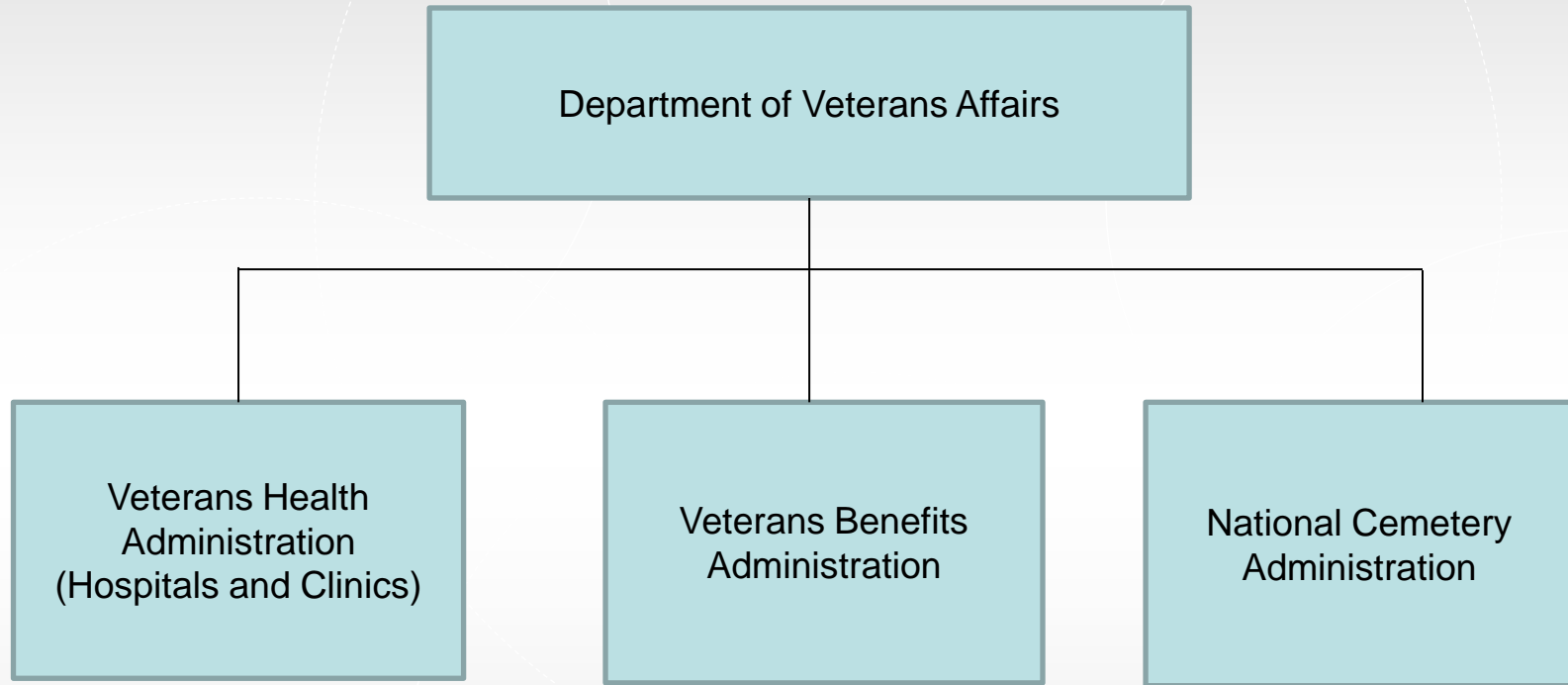
Potential Exposures

Health Effects

VA Health Care

Other VA Resources

Department of Veterans Affairs



Who are we at WRIISC?



We are a 2nd 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

Potential ODSS Exposure Concerns

- CARC Paint
- Chemical and Biological Weapons
- Depleted Uranium
- Harsh living conditions
- Incoming fire, explosive events
- Industrial solvents and chemicals
- Infections
- Injuries, musculoskeletal wear and tear
- Loud noises
- Oil Well Fires, Smoke, and Petroleum
- Pesticides
- Physical and Mental Stressors
- Pyridostigmine Bromide
- Sand, Dust, Airborne Particulate Matter
- Vaccinations

REF: WRIISC Clinical Reports

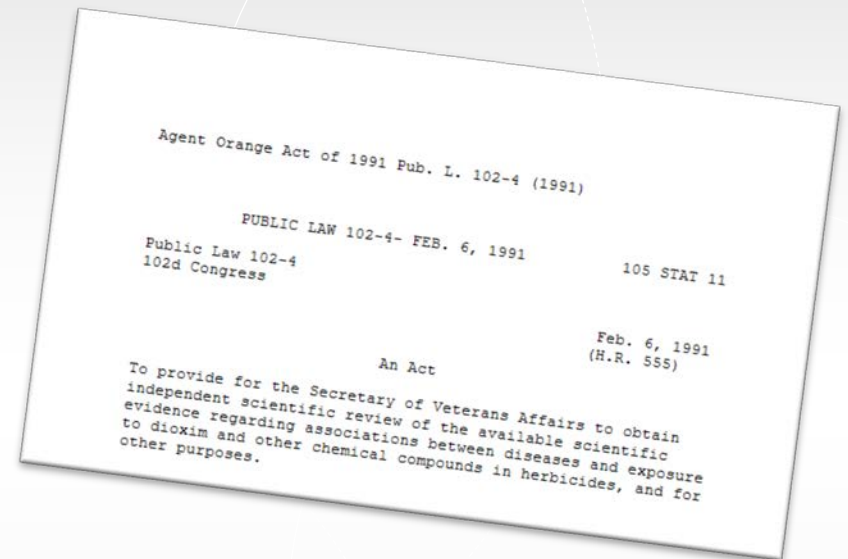
Gulf War Locator Map

United States Army Public Health
Command:

- <https://usaphcapps.amedd.army.mil/gwf/entry.asp>
- Provides estimates of oil well fire smoke exposure

Public Law 102-4

- Public Law 102-4
(Agent Orange Act of 1991)
 - Provides the foundation to allow VA to obtain independent scientific review of evidence regarding associations between diseases and exposures. Established presumption of **exposure & service connection** for diseases.
 - Institute of Medicine reviews Gulf War research and makes scientific recommendations to VA.



What are presumptions and why do we have them?

- Lack of reliable exposure data and specific causal evidence
- 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

Gulf War 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 disease(s) within the time frames shown here **and** have a current disability as a result of that disease in order to receive VA disability compensation.

Gulf War 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.

Gulf War 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.

Gulf War 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.

Gulf War Associated Conditions

Medically Unexplained Chronic Symptoms:

- Some Gulf War Veterans experience 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." Does not use the term "Gulf War Syndrome" when referring to medically unexplained symptoms reported by Gulf War Veterans. Why? Because symptoms often vary widely among Veterans.

Chronic Multi-Symptom Illness

- Institute of Medicine definition:
 - The presence of a spectrum of chronic symptoms experienced for 6 months or longer in at least two of six categories—fatigue, mood and cognition, musculoskeletal, gastrointestinal, respiratory and neurologic—that may overlap with but are not fully captured by known syndromes (such as irritable bowel syndrome, chronic fatigue syndrome, and fibromyalgia)

Gulf War Associated Conditions

- VA presumes certain chronic, unexplained symptoms existing for 6 months or more are related to Gulf War 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:** a condition of long-term and severe fatigue that is not relieved by rest and is not directly caused by other conditions.
 - **Fibromyalgia:** a condition characterized by widespread muscle pain. Other symptoms may include insomnia, morning stiffness, headache, and memory problems.

Gulf War Associated Conditions

- **Functional gastrointestinal disorders:** a group of conditions marked by chronic or recurrent symptoms related to any part of the gastrointestinal tract. Functional condition refers to an abnormal function of an organ, without a structural alteration in the tissues. Examples include irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), functional dyspepsia, and functional abdominal pain syndrome.
- **Undiagnosed illnesses:** symptoms that may include but are not limited to: abnormal weight loss, fatigue, cardiovascular disease, muscle and joint pain, headache, menstrual disorders, neurological and psychological problems, skin conditions, respiratory disorders, and sleep disturbances.

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

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.
 - Toxicology tests often of limited value since they can not confirm remote exposures
 - Depleted Uranium 24-hour urine 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?

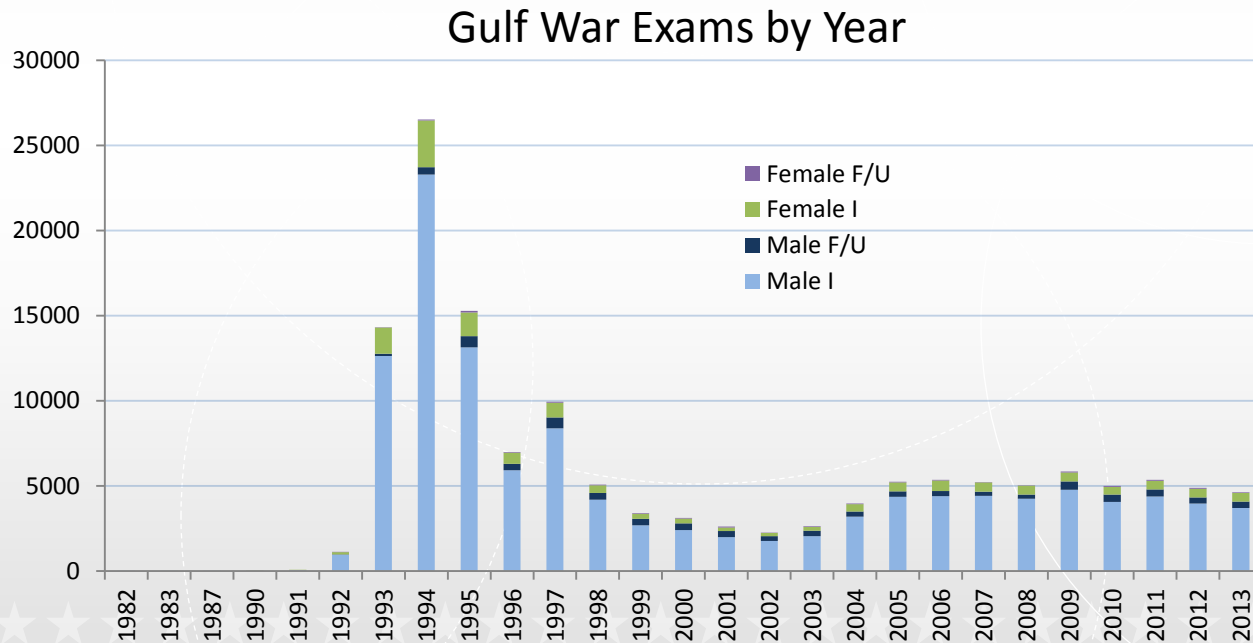
Can Veteran family members receive health registry exams?

Gulf War Registries

- Registries:
 - Gulf War Registry:
http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/gulfwar/registry_exam.asp
 - DU Registry
http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/depleted_uranium/followup_program.asp
 - Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry
<http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/burnpits/action-plan.asp>
- Gulf War Review Newsletter
 - Sign up for free at:
<http://www.easmailcall.aac.va.gov/>
 - Gulf War Review Newsletter PDF available at
<http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/gulfwar/publications/index.asp>
- VA Environmental Health Coordinators
 - <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp>

Gulf War Registry (144,443 Veterans as of 1/21/14)

- Free, no-enrollment required
- **Not a compensation examination**
- Does not confirm 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



REF: VA Office of Public Health

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

Depleted Uranium Follow Up Program

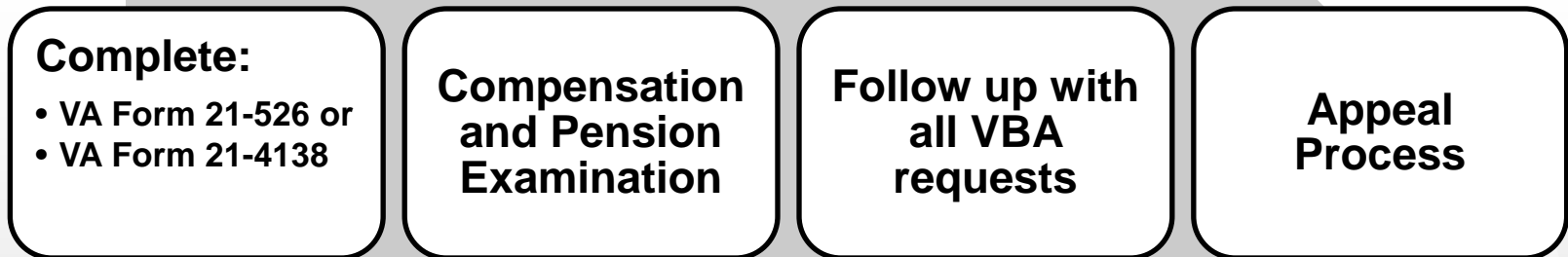
- VA and the Department of Defense established the Depleted Uranium Follow-Up Program at the Baltimore VA Medical Center to screen and monitor Veterans for health problems associated with exposure to depleted uranium (DU). This program is especially geared to Veterans who were on, in or near vehicles 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.
- 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.

VA Health Care Resources

- Gulf War exposure Information
 - <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/gulfwar/index.asp>
- My HealtheVet
 - <https://www.myhealth.va.gov/index.html>
 - Access Secure Messaging through Premium account
 - Access to many parts of your VA medical record
- Family support at Vet Centers
 - http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/vetcenter_fish.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

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 Gulf War service,
 - competent evidence of service in Gulf War, 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 Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm and who have a disease that VA recognizes as being associated with Gulf War service.
- Survivor benefits may be available.

Compensation Disability Benefits

Available Resources to Assist with Applications

- VA Web site (www.benefits.va.gov)
- File electronically at www.ebenefits.va.gov
- Veterans Benefits Administration Counselors
- Veteran Service Organization Counselors
- Vet Centers
- Information on how to apply for Gulf War related conditions:
 - <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

Important Contact Information

Veterans Benefits Administration:

800-827-1000 ext. 110

www.benefits.va.gov

VA Gulf War help line:

1-800-749-8387

DC Gulf War 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

Phone: 1-800-722-8340

Website: www.warrelatedillness.va.gov

Questions?



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