

AGENT ORANGE NEWSLETTER

INFORMATION FOR VIETNAM-ERA VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES



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VA ADDS THREE NEW AGENT ORANGE PRESUMPTIONS

VA presumes that [certain conditions](https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/conditions/index.asp) (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/conditions/index.asp>) are related to exposure to Agent Orange or other herbicides during service in Vietnam, and Vietnam Veterans who have these conditions will automatically be qualified for certain benefits. As a result of the FY21 National Defense Authorization Act, VA added three new conditions that are related to exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicides: bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and Parkinsonism (also known as Parkinson-like conditions).

Vietnam War-era Veterans and their survivors who previously filed and were denied benefits for one of these three new presumptive conditions will have their cases automatically reviewed without the need to refile a claim. VA will send letters to impacted Veterans and survivors.

VA presumes that the health problems listed on this page are related to herbicide exposure during Vietnam service. Also, VA presumes certain birth defects in children of Vietnam and Korea Veterans are associated with Veterans' qualifying military service.

New presumptions are in bold:

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

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/>.



VA'S ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH COORDINATORS – CONNECTING YOU TO REGISTRY EXAMS AND INFORMATION

Are you interested in being a part of one of VA's [Environmental Health Registries](https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/benefits/registry-evaluation.asp) (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/benefits/registry-evaluation.asp>) but don't know where to start? Do you want to learn about a specific environmental exposure from your military service and possible effects on your health? If the answer is yes to either of these questions, you may wish to contact an [Environmental Health Coordinator near you](https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp) (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp>).

"Environmental Health Coordinators are experts with VA's registries," said Shanna Smith, DrPH, MPH, CPH, a manager of VA's Environmental Health Coordinator and Clinician Program within Health Outcomes Military Exposures. "They can connect you to the Environmental Health Registries that are designed for when you served and guide you to information that can help you to better understand your exposures and health."

VA offers six [Environmental Health Registries](https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/benefits/registry-evaluation.asp) (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/benefits/registry-evaluation.asp>), including the [Agent Orange Registry](https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/benefits/registry-exam.asp) (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/benefits/registry-exam.asp>), VA's largest registry. You do



not need to be enrolled in VA health care to join. These registries provide free, voluntary medical assessments for Veterans who may have been exposed to certain environmental hazards during military service. They also help VA to better understand the health of Veterans.

The coordinators can help you schedule a convenient time for a registry exam with an environmental health clinician. Depending on where you live, you may have the option of having your exam completed through VA telehealth services, which is conducted via telephone instead of in person. If you have a telehealth exam and your health issues are considered complex, the clinician conducting your exam may ask you to come in for follow-up or tests in person.

A coordinator can also be a resource for you. They can help you find information about different military exposures and health, including the information on the www.publichealth.va.gov web site. Coordinators are trained to understand general military exposure topics. They have initial and continuing education trainings and attend bi-monthly meetings to stay on top of post-deployment health issues.

You can call an environmental health coordinator near you. VA offers a [directory of coordinators](https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp) (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp>) who are located at VA medical centers across the country.



VA'S WRIISC PRESENTS REMOTE MEDITATION AND YOGA CLASSES TO IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH

VA's War Related Illness and Injury Study Center offers four free, ongoing classes to help all Veterans, including Vietnam Veterans, relax and relieve stress from the comfort of their own homes.

Mindfulness Meditation – This class provides all Veterans with an opportunity to learn about and practice mindfulness meditation techniques for coping with the challenges and stressors of everyday life. This class teaches awareness of what's going on around you, as well as what's going on inside of you, and acceptance of whatever happens. Classes are available by phone from 11:00 a.m.-noon ET, roughly every two weeks. Join



any or all classes. Learn more: <https://www.warrelatedillness.va.gov/WaRRELATEDILLNESS/education/local-offerings/support/MindfulMeditationFlyer.pdf#>.

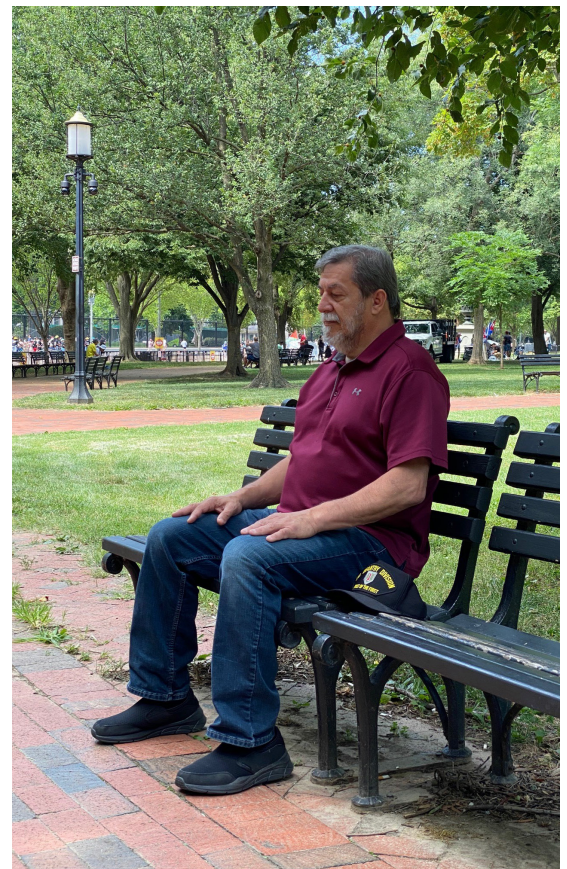
iRest Yoga Nidra Meditation Class – VA's iRest yoga nidra meditation class is designed to help all Veterans relax, release stress, and increase resiliency. This class is available each Tuesday at 5:00 p.m. ET and every Thursday at 8:00 p.m. ET by phone. Veterans can participate sitting, lying down, or standing, without any special equipment. You can join as many classes as you like. Find details at: <https://www.warrelatedillness.va.gov/WARRELATEDILLNESS/docs/yoga-nidra-meditation-veteran-DC-WRIISC-update.pdf#>

Guided Meditation – VA's spoken word guided yoga meditation class encourages a sense of calm and awareness.

VA-enrolled Veterans can participate in this class seated, lying down, or standing. This class is offered each Thursday by phone at 8:00 p.m. ET. There is no limit to the number of classes you can attend. Learn more at: [CA-yoga-nidra-meditation-veteran-new-number-02192021.pdf](https://www.warrelatedillness.va.gov/WARRELATEDILLNESS/docs/CA-yoga-nidra-meditation-veteran-new-number-02192021.pdf).

Yoga and Qi Gong – This program includes eight weekly yoga classes through VA Video Connect. Four of these classes are chair-based mindful movement yoga practices and are open to all VA-enrolled Veterans nationally. One class per week is dedicated to any VA-enrolled Veteran who identifies as female. One class per week is a Qi Gong movement and breath practice, also open to all VA-enrolled Veterans nationally. Find more information at <https://www.warrelatedillness.va.gov/WARRELATEDILLNESS/education/local-offerings/ca-wriisc.asp>.

Please check the class schedules online to find the latest dates and times.





VA'S SPINA BIFIDA HEALTH CARE BENEFITS PROGRAM

The Agent Orange Benefits Act of 1996 allows for benefits for children of Vietnam Veterans who have spina bifida. VA offers the [Spina Bifida Health Care Benefits Program](https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/programs/dependents/spinabifida/index.asp) (SBHCBP) for children of Vietnam Veterans and certain Korean War Veterans who have been:

- diagnosed with spina bifida in all forms except spina bifida occulta, and
- are considered eligible for a monetary award by VA's Veterans Benefits Administration.

The SBHCBP provides VA-financed health care benefits. As a part of this program, VA is the exclusive payer for services, and there are no out-of-pocket health care expenses for beneficiaries. The program also provides health care services and supplies beyond those related to spina bifida, monetary allowances, and vocational training and rehabilitation for enrolled beneficiaries.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) about 1,500 U.S. residents are born with spina bifida each year. The incidence fell after a CDC campaign on folic acid supplementation started in 1992. Currently, about 166,000 U.S. residents have spina bifida. As of September 2020, over 1,000 family members are covered under the VA benefits program for this.

There is a lack of scientific evidence showing a higher rate of spina bifida in offspring of Vietnam deployed Veterans as compared to non-deployed Veterans. One National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine consensus report felt there may be an association, but subsequent reports have not found spinal bifida or other birth defects to be associated with Vietnam deployment.

VA continues to review research related to birth defects and possible associations to deployment.

Learn more about the SBHCBP, operated by VA's Office of Community Care, at <https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/programs/dependents/spinabifida/index.asp> and at <https://www.benefits.gov/benefit/282>.

LIVER FLUKE INFECTION AND BILE DUCT CANCER

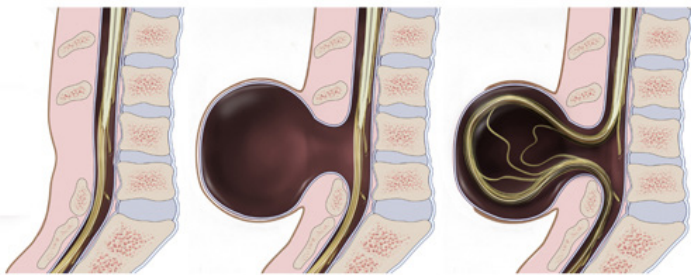
Did you eat raw or undercooked fish while in Vietnam? Vietnam Veterans who did during service in Southeast Asia may have been exposed to tiny parasites called liver flukes. Rarely, these liver fluke infections can lead to a cancer of the bile ducts called [cholangiocarcinoma](https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/infectious-diseases/cholangiocarcinoma.asp). Liver flukes can live up to 30 years in a human's bile ducts. Bile ducts are part of a network that carries the bile produced in the liver to be stored in the gall bladder and then emptied into the small intestine to help us absorb fats and some vitamins into our bodies.



liver fluke parasite

There are many other [risk factors](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21488076/) for bile duct cancer besides liver fluke infection, including diabetes, obesity, and past hepatitis B or C infection, and the rate of occurrence increases dramatically with age.

Some Veterans may be aware of a study published in 2018 that reported that past liver fluke infections may be more common in Vietnam Veterans. The study was criticized for a number of methodological errors that contradicted the conclusions.



Spina bifida occulta

Meningocele

Myelomeningocele

types of spinabifida

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Fortunately, analyses of VA health care data have not identified increased rates of cholangiocarcinoma in Vietnam Veteran patients. VA's [Vietnam Era Health Retrospective Observational Study](https://www.publichealth.va.gov/epidemiology/studies/heroes/index.asp) (VE-HEROeS) (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/epidemiology/studies/heroes/index.asp>), which compares the health of Vietnam Veterans, non-deployed Vietnam-era Veterans, and the U.S. public, is planning to conduct an analysis on cholangiocarcinoma to help characterize the occurrence of this disease in Vietnam Veterans compared to other populations. Additionally, researchers at the Department of Defense are planning to study liver flukes in Veterans returning from recent conflicts in Southeast Asia using more sophisticated laboratory techniques to measure possible exposure more accurately to these parasites.

Please see the website at <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/infectious-diseases/cholangiocarcinoma.asp> for more information.



airplane sprays herbicides

VA'S TACTICAL HERBICIDE AND AGENT ORANGE LOCATION LIST – NEW UPDATES

Tactical herbicides such as Agent Orange had limited usage, testing, or storage in several other countries besides Vietnam, such as the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), Thailand, and United States. VA and the Department of Defense (DoD) have partnered together to investigate where and when Agent Orange and other tactical herbicides were present, and to update the [list of locations online](https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/locations/index.asp) (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/locations/index.asp>) as new information becomes available.

A two-year investigation (2018-2019) by DoD found no use, storage or transport of Agent Orange or other tactical herbicides in Guam, Okinawa, Panama, or a number of other countries where there had been speculation of use. Also, the investigation found less use in Thailand and the DMZ than previously reported. The investigation did confirm use or tests in additional sites and dates in other locations.

During 2020-2021, VA and DoD updated the [list of locations](https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/locations/tests-storage/index.asp) (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/locations/tests-storage/index.asp>) based on new information to several locations in the U.S. and overseas, including Thailand, Korea, and Alabama. In one case, at Gulfport, Mississippi, new information received from a Veteran led to changes for that site on the list. Both VA and DoD welcome new

information on locations for the historical testing or use of tactical herbicides.

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](https://www.va.gov/decision-reviews/supplemental-claim/) (<https://www.va.gov/decision-reviews/supplemental-claim/>).



If you have questions or information about locations where tactical herbicides were used, tested, or stored, please contact the DoD Armed Forces Pest Management Board by e-mail, fax, or mail:

E-mail:

osd.pentagon.ousd-atl.mbx.afpmb-tactical-herbicides@mail.mil

or

osd.pentagon.ousd-atl.mbx.afpmb@mail.mil

Fax:

(301) 295-7473

Address:

Armed Forces Pest Management Board
U.S. Army Garrison Forest Glen
2460 Linden Lane, Building 172
Silver Spring, MD 20910





VIETNAM VETERAN PROFILE

MICHELLE TAYLOR - FORMER NURSE AND AGENT ORANGE REGISTRY PARTICIPANT

Michelle Taylor is a Vietnam Veteran and a participant in the Agent Orange Registry. She began her service as a second lieutenant in the Army Nurse Corps and did basic training at Fort Sam in Houston for the Medical Nurse Corps. Taylor was deployed to Vietnam shortly after, in March 1969, as a first lieutenant.

Most of Taylor's service was on an intensive care surgical semi-vac truck. She also worked in triage and participated in goodwill medical missions. "I donated time at an orphanage in a leprosarium in Vietnam and turned 21 at the leprosarium," said Taylor. She served for two years, and then was re-stationed in Indianapolis at Fort Benjamin. Taylor was a practicing nurse until retiring about six years ago.



Michelle Taylor

Taylor decided to join the Agent Orange Registry after finding out about it through a neighbor. She has a rare autoimmune disease and wanted to learn more about her exposures in service, including Agent Orange, and how they may be affecting her health. "Especially with some of the medical missions we did, by boat or jeep, we went through areas that were deeply foliated and I never thought about it."

VA's [Agent Orange Registry \(https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/benefits/registry-exam.asp\)](https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/benefits/registry-exam.asp) is designed to help Vietnam-era Veterans learn about possible long-term health problems that may be related to Agent Orange exposure during their military service. Veterans can talk to an environmental health clinician and learn more about exposures and health. The registry also helps VA to better understand Veterans' health needs.

VA encourages more women like Taylor to join this registry. Not only will women learn about the connection between their exposures and their health, but it will help VA understand the health of women Vietnam Veterans like them. Taylor was able to have her registry exam at the VA medical center near her home in Colorado.

To be eligible for the Agent Orange Registry, you need to have served in Vietnam between

1962 and 1975, either on the ground or as a Brown or Blue Water Navy Veteran; or have served in Korea, Thailand, or on a C-123 aircraft between 1969 and 1986. Contact an [Environmental Health Coordinator \(https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp\)](https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp) to schedule a registry exam near you.

INTERGENERATIONAL HEALTH EFFECTS AND EXPOSURES

Many Veterans, the media, and other stakeholders have questions about possible intergenerational health effects from exposures during deployment.

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM), an independent, scientific organization that reviews the latest scientific literature on different topics, has released several reports to VA on intergenerational health effects related to military exposures.

One of the earliest NASEM reports is the [Adverse Reproductive Outcomes in Families of Atomic Veterans: The Feasibility of Epidemiologic Studies \(1995\) \(https://www.nap.edu/catalog/4992/adverse-reproductive-outcomes-in-families-of-atomic-veterans-the-feasibility\)](https://www.nap.edu/catalog/4992/adverse-reproductive-outcomes-in-families-of-atomic-veterans-the-feasibility). This report noted that the "prevailing view is that exposure of the human male to chemicals and ionizing radiation is generally unrelated to the occurrence of developmental endpoints such as miscarriage, birth defects, growth retardation, and cancer."

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In the related area of women's health, for Veterans who served at Camp Lejeune and their family members, VA provides health care or reimbursement for out of pocket expenses related to female infertility and miscarriages due to possible links with exposure to the contaminated water there.

Learn more at <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/camp-lejeune/>.

In the most recent NASEM volume on Agent Orange, [Veterans and Agent Orange: Update 11 \(2018\)](https://www.nap.edu/catalog/25137/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. However, VA provides benefits for children of Vietnam Veterans who have [spina bifida](https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/birth-defects/spina-bifida.asp) (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/birth-defects/spina-bifida.asp>), and for [children of women Vietnam 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>) who have various birth defects.

In [Gulf War and Health, Volume 11: Generational Effects of Serving in the Gulf War \(2018\)](https://www.nap.edu/catalog/25162/gulf-war-and-health-volume-11-generational-effects-of-serving-in-the-gulf-war) ([https://www.nap.edu/catalog/25162/gulf-war-](https://www.nap.edu/catalog/25162/gulf-war-and-health-volume-11-generational-effects-of-serving-in-the-gulf-war)

[and-health-volume-11-generational-health-effects-of](https://www.nap.edu/catalog/25162/gulf-war-and-health-volume-11-generational-effects-of-serving-in-the-gulf-war)), NASEM reviewed several hazards related to military service and their associations with reproductive, developmental, and other gene-related effects in parents and children. It noted that some birth defects may have environmental associations and further research is needed. Some examples of these associations are infectious diseases like rubella (German measles), which acts directly on the developing baby in the womb.

NASEM also noted that in order to explore the issue of birth defects and environmental exposures, a national birth defects registry and national health record are part of the solution. Since neither a national birth defects registry nor a national health record exist, the ability to fully study the connection between birth defects and environmental exposures is currently not feasible.



VA's Post Deployment Health Services, the office that produces this newsletter, has been renamed Health Outcomes Military Exposures, or HOME. This new name, changed on July 18, reflects the comprehensive work that the office does in policy, research, education, and best practices regarding military environmental and toxic exposures. It reflects the work of the office in both deployment-related exposures and garrison environmental exposures.



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

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