



Department of
Veterans Affairs

Agent Orange Brief

No. 2

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AGENT ORANGE REGISTRY

What is it?

In mid-1978 the Veterans Administration, now known as the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), set up a register of Vietnam veterans who were worried that they may have been exposed to chemical herbicides which might be causing a variety of ill effects and who took an extensive medical examination offered at all VA health care facilities. The Agent Orange Registry is a computerized index of those examinations.

What should a participating veteran expect?

Each veteran participating in this voluntary program, offered at all VA medical centers, is given the following baseline laboratory studies: chest x-ray (if one has not been done within the past 6 months); complete blood count; blood chemistries and enzyme studies; and urinalysis. Evidence is also sought concerning the following potentially relevant symptoms or conditions: altered sex drive; congenital deformities (birth defects) among children; neoplasms or cancers, including soft tissue sarcoma and lymphoma (including non-Hodgkin's lymphoma); repeated infections; sterility; and difficulties in carrying pregnancies to term (a problem experienced by the wives of some Vietnam veterans).

How does a veteran benefit from taking the Agent Orange Registry examination?

The examination provides the participating veteran with an opportunity to receive a complete health evaluation and answers to questions concerning the current state of knowledge regarding the possible relationship between herbicide exposure and subsequent health problems. Following completion of the examination, the veteran is given the results of the physical exam and laboratory studies. This information is provided to the veteran by both a face-to-face discussion with a physician familiar with the health aspects of the Agent Orange issue and a follow-up letter summarizing the results of the examination. Occasionally, previously undetected medical problems are found. With prompt attention, many times these illnesses may be successfully treated. The Registry permits VA to contact veterans for further testing if continuing research efforts should make this action advisable.

Does the Agent Orange Registry have an impact on research efforts?

The Registry provides a means of detecting clues or suggestions of specific health problems in the event that unexpected or unusual health trends show up in this group of veterans. Such clues could then form the basis for the design and conduct of specific scientific studies.

Who is eligible?

Any veteran, male or female, who had active military service in the Republic of Vietnam between 1962 to 1975, and expresses a concern relating to exposure to herbicides may participate in the Registry. Eligible veterans who want to participate in this program should contact the nearest VA medical facility for an appointment. A veteran who did not serve in Vietnam is not eligible for the Agent Orange Registry examination. Similarly, the spouses and children of veterans are not eligible for this examination.

What are the limitations and uses of the Registry?

It is important to understand that the Agent Orange Registry is not a scientific study. Because of the self-selected nature (that is, the individuals decide themselves to be part of the Registry rather than being "chosen" in a scientific manner) of the Registry participants, this group of veterans cannot, with any scientific validity, be viewed as being representational of Vietnam veterans as a whole. Therefore, the health-related information collected cannot be used for scientific research. The information can, however, be used to detect possible health trends, as noted above, and can provide some useful facts about the group itself. For example, it is possible to show the numbers in each branch of military service, the period(s) of service in Vietnam, kinds of symptoms veterans are experiencing, and some of the results of the physical examinations. From this type of information, it is possible to develop the relative frequency or internal proportional distribution of certain health problems. That is, we could find that health condition "A" is appearing in five times as many Registry participants as problem "B." However, since participation in the Registry program is entirely voluntary, one cannot make statistically valid comparisons directly between this group of veterans and other groups of veterans or non-veterans.

Who has participated in the Registry?

More than 240,000 Vietnam veterans have already participated in this program. Although the program is now more than 11 years old, hundreds of veterans are still contacting the VA each week for their initial Registry examination. Many of these veterans have no medical problems; others present a wide range of ailments. Veterans interested in receiving the Agent Orange Registry examination should contact the nearest VA medical center.

If a veteran who has participated in the Agent Orange Registry examination program changes residence who should he or she contact?

A veteran who moves after receiving the Agent Orange examination should contact the Agent Orange Coordinator at the nearest VA medical center and the Agent Orange Clerk (200/397B), VA Data Processing Center, 1615 East Woodward Street, Austin, Texas 78772. Both the old and new addresses should be indicated.

If a Vietnam veteran receives an Agent Orange Registry examination, does that automatically make him or her eligible for disability compensation?

No. Veterans who wish to be considered for disability compensation must file a claim for that benefit. Many Agent Orange Registry participants have no medical problems. For more information regarding disability compensation, see Agent Orange Brief, Number 8.

Who should be contacted for additional information regarding the Agent Orange Registry?

At each VA medical center there is a specially trained "Environmental Physician" responsible for the conduct of Agent Orange Registry examinations. These individuals participate in regularly scheduled nationwide conference calls and receive mailouts from VA headquarters updating them on the latest developments on Agent Orange. Each medical center also has an Agent Orange Coordinator who has a great deal of information about the Agent Orange Registry and related matters. VA medical center libraries also have considerable information, including videotapes, regarding Agent Orange. The Environmental Medicine Office (10B/AO), Department of Veterans Affairs, 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20420, is another good source of information on this subject.