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10 things every Veteran should know about Agent Orange

Learn the basics of VA's Agent Orange benefits and care

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1. Agent Orange was a herbicide and defoliant used in Vietnam

Agent Orange was a blend of tactical herbicides the U.S. military sprayed from 1962 to 1971 during the Vietnam War to remove the leaves of trees and other dense tropical foliage that provided enemy cover. The U.S. Department of Defense developed tactical herbicides specifically to be used in “combat operations.” They were not commercial grade herbicides purchased from chemical companies and sent to Vietnam.

More than 19 million gallons of various “rainbow” herbicide combinations were sprayed, but Agent Orange was the combination the U.S. military used most often. The name “Agent Orange” came from the orange identifying stripe used on the 55-gallon drums in which it was stored.

Heavily sprayed areas included forests near the demarcation zone, forests at the junction of the borders of Cambodia, Laos, and South Vietnam, and mangroves on the southernmost peninsula of Vietnam and along shipping channels southeast of Saigon.

2. Any Veteran who served anywhere in Vietnam during the war is presumed to have been exposed to Agent Orange.

For the purposes of VA compensation benefits, Veterans who served anywhere in Vietnam between January 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975 are presumed to have been exposed to herbicides, as specified in the [Agent Orange Act of 1991](#).

These Veterans do not need to show that they were exposed to Agent Orange or other herbicides in order to get disability compensation for [diseases related to Agent Orange exposure](#).

Service in Vietnam means service on land in Vietnam or on the inland waterways (“brown water” Veterans) of Vietnam.

3. VA has linked several diseases and health conditions to Agent Orange exposure.

VA has recognized certain cancers and other health problems as presumptive diseases associated with [exposure to Agent Orange or other herbicides](#) during military service. Veterans and their survivors may be eligible for compensation benefits.

- **AL Amyloidosis**
A rare disease caused when an abnormal protein, amyloid, enters and collects tissues or organs
- **Chronic B-cell Leukemias**
A type of cancer which affects a specific type of white blood cell
- **Chloracne** (or similar acneform disease)
A skin condition that occurs soon after exposure to chemicals and looks like common forms of acne seen in teenagers. Under VA's rating regulations, it must be at least 10 percent disabling within one year of exposure to herbicides.
- **Diabetes Mellitus Type 2**
A disease characterized by high blood sugar levels resulting from the body's inability to produce or respond properly to the hormone insulin
- **Hodgkin's Disease**
A malignant lymphoma (cancer) characterized by progressive enlargement of the lymph nodes, liver, and spleen, and by progressive anemia
- **Ischemic Heart Disease**
A disease characterized by a reduced supply of blood to the heart, that can lead to chest pain (angina)

- **Multiple Myeloma**
A cancer of plasma cells, a type of white blood cell in bone marrow
- **Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma**
A group of cancers that affect the lymph glands and other lymphatic tissue
- **Parkinson's Disease**
A progressive disorder of the nervous system that affects muscle movement
- **Peripheral Neuropathy, Early-Onset**
A nervous system condition that causes numbness, tingling, and muscle weakness. Under VA's rating regulations, it must be at least 10 percent disabling within one year of herbicide exposure.
- **Porphyria Cutanea Tarda**
A disorder characterized by liver dysfunction and by thinning and blistering of the skin in sun-exposed areas. Under VA's rating regulations, it must be at least 10 percent disabling within one year of exposure to herbicides.
- **Prostate Cancer**
Cancer of the prostate; one of the most common cancers among older men
- **Respiratory Cancers** (includes lung cancer)
Cancers of the lung, larynx, trachea, and bronchus
- **Soft Tissue Sarcomas** (other than osteosarcoma, chondrosarcoma, Kaposi's sarcoma, or mesothelioma)
A specific group of malignant of cancers in body tissues such as muscle, fat, blood and lymph vessels, and connective tissues



4. Veterans who want to be considered for disability compensation must file a claim.

Veterans who want to be considered for disability compensation for health problems related to Agent Orange exposure must [file a claim](#).

During the claims process, VA will check military records to confirm exposure to Agent Orange or qualifying military service. If necessary, VA will set up a separate exam for compensation.

5. VA offers health care benefits for Veterans who may have been exposed to Agent Orange and other herbicides during military service.

Veterans who served in Vietnam between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975, are eligible to enroll in VA health care. Visit VA's [health benefits explorer](http://hbexplorer.vacloud.us) <<http://hbexplorer.vacloud.us>> to check your eligibility and learn how to apply.

6. Participating in an Agent Orange Registry health exam helps you, other Veterans and VA.

VA's Agent Orange Registry health exam alerts Veterans to possible long-term health problems that may be related to Agent Orange exposure during their military service. The registry data helps VA understand and respond to these health problems more effectively.

The exam is free to eligible Veterans and enrollment in VA health care is not necessary. Although the findings of your exam may be used to inform your subsequent care, they may not be used when applying for compensation as a separate exam is required. Contact your local [VA Environmental Health Coordinator](#) about getting an Agent Orange Registry health exam.

7. VA recognizes and offers support for the children of Veterans affected by Agent Orange who have birth defects.

VA has recognized that certain birth defects among Veterans' children are associated with Veterans' qualifying service in Vietnam or Korea.

- [Spina bifida \(except spina bifida occulta\)](#), a defect in the developing fetus that results in incomplete closing of the spine, is associated with Veterans' exposure to Agent Orange or other herbicides during qualifying service in Vietnam or Korea.
- [Birth defects in children of women Veterans](#) are associated with their military service in Vietnam but are not related to herbicide exposure.

The affected child must have been conceived after the Veteran entered Vietnam or the Korean demilitarized zone during the qualifying service period.

Learn more about benefits for Veterans' children with birth defects.

<http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/benefits/children-birth-defects.asp>



8. Vietnam Veterans are not the only Veterans who may have been exposed to Agent Orange.

Agent Orange and other herbicides used in Vietnam were used, tested or stored elsewhere, including some military bases in the United States. Other locations/scenarios in which Veterans were exposed to Agent Orange may include:

- [Korean Demilitarized Zone](#)
Exposure along the demilitarized zone in Korea between April 1, 1968 and August 31, 1971
- [Thailand Military Bases](#)
Possible exposure on or near the perimeters of military bases between February 28, 1961 and May 7, 1975
- [Herbicide Tests and Storage Outside Vietnam](#)
Possible exposure due to herbicide tests and storage at military bases in the United States and locations in other countries
- [Agent Orange Residue on Airplanes Used in Vietnam War](#)

Possible exposure of crew members to herbicide residue in c-123 planes flown after the Vietnam War

9. VA continues to conduct research on the long-term health effects of Agent Orange in order to better care for all Veterans.

VA and other Federal government Departments and agencies have conducted, and continue to conduct, extensive research evaluating the health effects of Agent Orange exposure on U.S. Veterans.

An example is the Army Chemical Corps Vietnam-Era Veterans Health Study designed to examine if high blood pressure (hypertension) and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) are related to herbicide exposure during the Vietnam War. Researchers have completed data collection and aim to publish initial findings in a scientific journal in 2015.

Learn more about Agent Orange related studies and their outcomes
here:<http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/research-studies.asp>

10. VA contracts with an independent, non-governmental organization to review the scientific and medical information on the health effects of Agent Orange.

VA contracts with the Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the National Academy of Sciences every two years to scientifically review evidence on the long-term health effects of Agent Orange and other herbicides on Vietnam Veterans. The IOM uses a team of nationally renowned subject matter experts from around the country to gather all the scientific literature on a topic, identify peer-reviewed reports, and then examine the studies to determine the most rigorous and applicable studies. The IOM looks for the highest quality studies. The IOM then issues its reports, including its conclusions and recommendations to VA, Congress, and the public.

About the author:

Dr. Ralph Erickson is an Army Veteran of the Gulf War (1990-91) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003). He retired with 32 + years active-duty service, during which he held a number of leadership positions to include: Commander of The Walter Reed Army Institute of Research; Command Surgeon, US Central Command; and Director, DoD Global Emerging Infections and Response System (DOD-GEIS). He is a board certified physician in Preventive Medicine and Public Health. He received his medical degree from the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USUHS), Masters of Public Health from Harvard University, and Doctorate of Public Health from Johns Hopkins University.