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If Veterans don't help Veterans, who will?

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Edgewood/Aberdeen Experiments



From 1955 to 1975, the U.S. Army Chemical Corps conducted classified medical studies at Edgewood Arsenal, Maryland. The purpose was to evaluate the impact of low-dose chemical warfare agents on military personnel and to test protective clothing and pharmaceuticals.

If you are concerned about exposures during Edgewood/Aberdeen chemical tests, talk to your health care provider or local [VA Environmental Health Coordinator](#).

Health effects of the experiments

About 7,000 soldiers took part in these experiments that involved exposures to more than 250 different chemicals, according to the Department of Defense (DoD). Some of the volunteers exhibited certain symptoms at the time of exposure to these agents. Long-term follow-up was not planned as part of the DoD studies. [Learn more from the Department of Defense](#).

The National Academies of Science (NAS) reviewed the potential for long-term health effects from these experiments and did not find any significant long-term physical harm, except for some Veterans exposed to larger doses of mustard agents. NAS published these studies under the title of, "Possible Long-Term Health Effects of Short-Term Exposure to Chemical Agents," in three volumes dated [1982](#), [1984](#) and [1985](#).

In a [2004 follow-up report](#) (201 KB, PDF), "Health Effects of Perceived Exposure to Biochemical Warfare Agents," NAS concluded that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) could occur as a result of "perceived exposure to biochemical warfare agents."

The Health and Medicine Division (formerly known as the Institute of Medicine) report, [Updated Literature Review of Sarin](#) (2004), found that research doesn't show long-term neurological problems from exposure to low levels of sarin. A low level of sarin is an amount that doesn't cause noticeable symptoms during the exposure.

Chemicals tested

The agents tested included chemical warfare agents and other related agents (inactive substances or placebos such as saline were used):

- Anticholinesterase nerve agents (ex., sarin and common organophosphorus (OP), and carbamate pesticides)
- Mustard agents
- Nerve agent antidotes atropine and scopolamine
- Nerve agent reactivators (ex., the common OP antidote 2-PAM chloride)
- Psychoactive agents (ex., LSD, PCP, cannabinoids, and BZ)
- Irritants and riot control agents
- Alcohol and caffeine

Determining risk

There are no tests today that can confirm exposure to agents from decades ago. However, a good history and physical examination can provide valuable information and help determine a Veteran's risk of developing health problems related to the exposure. Long-term psychological effects are possible from the trauma associated with being a human test subject.

Health concerns?

If you are concerned about exposures during Edgewood/Aberdeen chemical tests, talk to your health care provider or your local environmental health provider. There is no VA environmental health registry associated with Edgewood/Aberdeen chemical tests.

VA offers a variety of [health care benefits](#) to eligible Veterans. Not enrolled in the VA health care system? [Find out if you qualify for VA health care.](#)

Compensation benefits for health problems

Veterans may file a claim for disability compensation for health problems they believe are related to exposures during Edgewood/Aberdeen chemical tests. VA decides these claims on a case-by-case basis. [File a claim online.](#)

Learn more about [VA benefits](#).