

Understanding Veteran Administration's Agent Orange Presumptives

By Jennifer Langlois

During the Vietnam War the U.S. Military sprayed millions of gallons of tactical herbicides on vegetation in Vietnam and some other locations in the region. Veterans who served in-country (boots-on-ground) in Vietnam may have been exposed to the chemical defoliant Agent Orange (named for the orange band around its storage barrels). Other locations with possible Agent Orange exposure include: the Korean Demilitarized Zone, on Thai Air Force bases, and veterans who flew on or worked on [C-123](#) Aircraft.

People who have been exposed to Agent Orange are more likely than the general population to get certain illnesses. The VA calls these illnesses "Presumptives" because they presume if a veteran who served in Vietnam, or at other potential exposure sites, contracts one of these illnesses that it was caused by Agent Orange exposure. It should be noted that just because a veteran was exposed to Agent Orange *does not mean they will get* these illnesses. Exposure only makes it more likely that they *might* get one of these illnesses. Veterans who were exposed and who contract one of the illnesses on the VA Presumptives list are eligible to apply for a monthly financial payment called disability compensation. In order to receive disability compensation for an Agent Orange related illness a veteran must meet all the following criteria: 1) have served in a location that the VA concedes was an exposure location 2) have a medical diagnosis of one of the Presumptive illnesses on the VA list and 3) apply for the compensation. In some cases a veteran may have to provide evidence that they were exposed or provide medical opinions that state their illness is believed to be caused by exposure to Agent Orange.

For Vietnam Veterans who do not currently have an Agent Orange related illness there are still some potentially valuable benefits available. There is a free Agent Orange Registry Health Exam available to eligible Veterans who may have been exposed. According to the VA website *"This comprehensive health exam includes an exposure history, medical history, physical exam, and any tests if needed. A VA health professional will discuss the results face-to-face with the Veteran and in a follow-up letter."* Also all Vietnam Veterans who served in-country are eligible to enroll in the VA Health Care System. Enrollment in the VA Health Care System allows a veteran to receive quality medical care at low to no cost depending on the individual veteran's circumstances.

Veterans who have questions or who are interested in applying for compensation for an Agent Orange related illness may contact the Shawano County Veteran Service Office for more information. The Shawano County Veteran Service Officer is available to answer questions or help veterans with the application process. Contact Nick Benzinger at: 715-526-9183

The following is a recent list of VA Presumptives for Agent Orange exposure taken from the VA website (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/conditions/index.asp>)

- [AL Amyloidosis](#)
A rare disease caused when an abnormal protein, amyloid, enters tissues or organs
- [Chronic B-cell Leukemias](#)
A type of cancer which affects white blood cells
- [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 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 leads to chest pain
- [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 motor 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 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 group of different types of cancers in body tissues such as muscle, fat, blood and lymph vessels, and connective tissues

A list of Potential Exposure sites – (taken from VA website)

- [Exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam](#)
Exposure on land in Vietnam or on a ship operating on the inland waterways of Vietnam between January 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975
- [C-123 Airplanes and Agent Orange Residue](#)
Possible exposure of crew members to herbicide residue in C-123 planes flown after the Vietnam War
- [Blue Water Veterans](#)
Possible exposure on open sea ships off the shore of Vietnam during the Vietnam War
- [U.S. Navy and Coast Guard Ships in Vietnam](#)
Ships and boats with operations in Vietnam between January 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975
- [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