



National Gulf War Resource Center gives this information out free for all veterans.



Kansas Study Finds Symptoms Linked to Gulf War Service

The State of Kansas recently released the results of a health study of over 2,000 Kansas veterans who served during the Gulf War. The study was conducted by the Kansas Persian Gulf War Veterans Health Initiative Program with the help of Kansas State University.

The Kansas study was the first to identify clear links between Gulf veterans' health problems and the time and places in which they served. Results suggest that the unexplained health problems may be due to multiple factors. The study, conducted by telephone interview, compared the health of Kansas Gulf War veterans to veterans who served in other areas during the war. A scientific article describing the study results was published in the November 15, 2000, issue of *The American Journal of Epidemiology*.

"Gulf War illness" symptom pattern The study found 8 types of symptoms connected with Gulf War service: neurological symptoms, pain symptoms, gastrointestinal problems, respiratory problems, problems associated with fatigue and sleep difficulties, and skin problems.

About a third of Gulf veterans affected Overall, 34% of Kansas veterans who served in Desert Shield or Desert Storm had symptoms of Gulf War illness. The severity of these problems varied widely. Some veterans had relatively mild symptoms; others were so ill they could no longer work.

Symptoms in Veterans Who Were Not in the Persian Gulf

The study also found that veterans who did not serve in the Persian Gulf, but reported getting shots from the military during the war, may have some of the same health problems as Gulf War veterans. **Gulf War illness symptoms were found in 12% of non-Gulf veterans who said they got vaccines during the war, compared to less than 4% of veterans who did not get vaccines.**

Is There a "Gulf War Syndrome"?

Since Desert Storm, a large number of Gulf veterans have reported unexplained health problems. Some veterans have conditions that are serious and disabling, others have a few problems that bother them, but don't keep them from their usual activities. Still others have more vague symptoms that are hard to distinguish from "just getting older".

What are these problems? The symptoms reported by Gulf veterans can vary from person to person. The most common problems include chronic headaches, joint pain, fatigue, memory problems, mood disturbances, diarrhea and other digestive difficulties, respiratory problems, and skin rashes.

Why are veterans ill? No one knows exactly, but a number of potentially toxic substances have been suggested as possible contributors. According to the Department of Defense, about 100,000 Gulf War veterans may have been exposed to and fumes from jet fuel and tent heaters. Government reports have suggested that physical and/or psychological stress may have contributed to these problems, either alone or in combination with other exposures.

How many veterans are affected? Nationwide, the total number of veterans with unexplained health problems is unknown. (See report on Kansas veterans, next page). About 120,000 of 697,000 eligible veterans have enrolled in one of the federal Gulf War registries, and over 180,000 have been rated for service-connected disabilities by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

So, is there a Gulf War Syndrome? Studies conducted throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe consistently show that a substantial number of Gulf War veterans have unexplained health problems. However, since these symptoms are not the same for all veterans and may be due to multiple factors, there may not be a single, unique "Gulf War Syndrome." Veterans' advocates, government officials, and researchers now generally use the term "Gulf War illness" or "Gulf War illnesses" to refer to these unexplained health problems.

Kansas Commission Study

A recently released study from the Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs has found that 34 percent of Persian Gulf War (PGW) veterans are affected by a pattern of symptoms linked to military service in the Persian Gulf War, and that the rate of illness differs by where and when veterans served in the war.

Dr. Lea Steele, author of the report, noted that since the war, PGW veterans have reported anomalous health problems that include a variety of chronic symptoms such as fatigue, headache, joint pain, rashes, respiratory problems and, neuropsychological difficulties. She conducted a population-based survey of over 2,000 Kansas veterans, to compare the health of PGW veterans with veterans who served in other areas during the same period.

Dr. Steele conceded that it is not known whether the health experience of Kansas veterans is representative of PGW veterans nationally. She concluded her report by adding that health problems reported by PGW veterans over the last decade remain largely an unsolved mystery. "These health problems appear to be complex, and their understanding will likely require an approach that considers "clusters of causes" and "combinations of effects."