

# The American Legion



*For God and country*

★ NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS ★ P.O. BOX 1055 ★ INDIANAPOLIS, IN 46206-1055 \*  
★ (317) 630-1200 ★ Fax (317) 630-1233 \* WEBSITE [www.legion.org](http://www.legion.org) \*

## FACT SHEET: GULF WAR VETERANS

### PEOPLE:

697,000 servicemembers served in the Southwest theater of operations during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm (August 2, 1990 to July 31, 1991). Congress has not officially ended the Gulf War era period. Therefore, anyone who served on active duty from August 2, 1990 to present is considered a Gulf War era veteran.

The American Legion has more than 84,000 Gulf War era veterans among its membership.

### GULF WAR VETERANS' ILLNESSES:

Thousands of Gulf War veterans are suffering from chronic symptoms of fatigue, joint and muscle pain, headaches, and other symptoms known as "Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses." [The Department of Defense \(DoD\) has spent \\$247 million on 239 scientific studies to determine the nature and prevalence of these illnesses. Of those studies, 184 have been completed. The Department of Veteran Affairs has 16 actively funded projects.](#) No one cause has been linked to these illnesses although U.S. troops were exposed to a host of environmental hazards that alone, or in combination, could have caused or contributed to illness.

### DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:

#### Health Exams and Medical Treatment

- Public Law (PL) 102-585 established VA's Persian Gulf Registry in August 1992. Any Gulf War veteran is eligible for a free, complete physical examination with basic lab studies, whether or not the veteran is ill at the time.
- 86,000 Gulf War veterans have taken advantage of this special health examination.
- VA has designated a physician at every VA medical center to coordinate this program.
- Gulf War veterans are eligible for medical treatment from VA where an illness possibly related to exposure to an environmental hazard or toxic substance is detected during a Registry examination.

#### Disability Compensation Claims

- VA has approved more than 170,000 claims of 1991 Gulf War veterans for service injuries or illnesses of all kinds.
- Public Law 103-446, enacted in 1994, authorized VA to pay compensation to disabled Gulf War veterans suffering from undiagnosed illnesses. The undiagnosed illness must have become

manifest either while the veteran was in the Southwest Asia theater or prior to January 1, 2007, if symptoms first developed after the veteran left Southwest Asia.

- Effective March 1, 2002, provisions of Public Law 107-103, signed into law on December 27, 2001, clarify and further expand the definition of undiagnosed illness under the law to include medically unexplained chronic multi symptom illness, such as chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, and irritable bowel syndrome, that is defined by a cluster of signs or symptoms. Signs or symptoms that may be a manifestation of an undiagnosed or chronic multi symptom illness include the following: fatigue, unexplained rashes or other dermatological signs or symptoms, muscle pain, joint pain, neurological signs or symptoms, signs or symptoms involving the upper or lower respiratory system, sleep disturbances, gastrointestinal signs or symptoms, cardiovascular signs or symptoms, abnormal weight loss, menstrual disorders. A disability is considered chronic if it has existed for at least six months.
- As of August 2003, 13,281 claims for undiagnosed illness have been processed, of which 3,403 have been approved and 9,878 have been denied, constituting a denial rate of approximately 75%.

#### DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE:

- 58,595 active duty Gulf War Veterans have requested participation in DoD's Comprehensive Clinical Evaluation Program (CCEP). The CCEP is DoD's equivalent of VA's Persian Gulf Registry.
- Dr. Bernard Rostker was appointed in November 1996 to revamp DoD's approach to Gulf War Illnesses after the Presidential Advisory Committee found DoD's efforts superficial and lacking credibility. He increased the manpower devoted to investigating chemical and biological warfare agents' exposures ten fold, and his office reached out to veterans and Veterans Service Organizations in an effort to restore DoD's credibility on this issue. The office formerly headed by Dr. Rostker was re-designated as the Deployment Health Support Directorate in May 2002 and is responsible for all deployment health related issues and investigations.

#### THE AMERICAN LEGION:

##### Serving Gulf War Veterans and Families

- The American Legion is a congressionally chartered Veterans Service Organization with nearly 3 million members dedicated to serving America's veterans and their families.
- In 2002, the Legion's Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) program provided almost \$104,000 in grants to Gulf War era veterans and families in need. The grants are typically used to provide a temporary financial boost during a financial or medical crisis.
- The Legion created a Gulf War Task Force in 1995 to focus on the special needs and concerns of Gulf War veterans. Since Congress has not officially ended the Gulf War era, and numerous peacekeeping missions and operations, including the War on Terrorism and the current war in Iraq, have taken place since the 1991 Gulf War, the Task Force has been expanded to serve the needs and interests of veterans who served in these operations as well.
- Legion service officers have helped many disabled Gulf War veterans file a disability claim with VA, and they provide this service free of charge to any veteran. One need not be a member of The American Legion to receive assistance from a Legion service officer.
- The Legion produced and distributed Radio Public Service Announcements informing Gulf War veterans about our Gulf War programs and VA benefits.

- The American Legion has produced several VA Benefits guides for Gulf War era veterans. .

#### HOW TO GET HELP

##### The American Legion

The American Legion 1-800-433-3318 or [http://www.legion.org/our\\_legion/ol\\_dsodir.php](http://www.legion.org/our_legion/ol_dsodir.php)

(For financial assistance, or help in dealing with VA or DoD)

American Legion Homepage [www.legion.org](http://www.legion.org)

Gulf War specific issues [gulfwar@legion.org](mailto:gulfwar@legion.org)

General VA-related issues [var@legion.org](mailto:var@legion.org)

##### Department of Veterans' Affairs

VA's Helpline 1-800-PGWVETS

Local VA Regional Office 1-800-827-1000

Gulf War Illness on the Internet <http://www.va.gov/health/envIRON/persgulf.htm>

##### Department of Defense

DoD CCEP 1-800-796-9699

DoD deployment incident hotline 1-800-497-6261

(If you witnessed an event that may have led to poor health for you or others)

Websites: [www.deploymentlink.osd.mil](http://www.deploymentlink.osd.mil)

[www.gulflink.osd.mil](http://www.gulflink.osd.mil)

October 2003