

The Agent Orange Legacy Project – Phase II

Our children & grandchildren





What is Agent Orange?

- An herbicide and defoliant used by the U.S. military during the Vietnam War to clear dense vegetation. It contained dioxin, a highly toxic chemical
- Persistent in the environment and human body
- Known to cause severe health issues, including cancer and genetic damage

Special Operations Veterans and Exposure

- Unique Risks:
 - Operated in heavily sprayed areas
 - Multiple exposures
 - Prolonged exposure due to extended missions in the field
 - Challenges in Documentation
 - Covert nature of operations often led to incomplete exposure records

What did Phase II hope to determine?

1. Is the percent of Agent Orange (AO) illness in Spec Op (SO) Vietnam (VN) descendants greater than that of VN vets as a whole?
2. What is the most common AO related illness or condition in the exposed descendants?
3. Are there certain conditions that the SO VN vet has that would translate to any condition in their descendants?

Previous research

- A 2016 investigation by the public interest news organization ProPublica identified multiple children of exposed veterans who experienced numerous other birth defects.
 - shortened limbs
 - webbed toes
 - extra vertebrae
 - autoimmune disorders
 - kidney dysfunction
 - digestive system disorders
 - many other rare conditions

Genetic Damage

- AO has been linked to severe health issues in veterans and potentially their children and grandchildren.
- If AO damages the DNA, the children of exposed veterans could transmit damaged genetic material to their children, even if they were not exposed to AO themselves
- Scientific studies have identified birth defects and health conditions in the offspring of exposed veterans, including spina bifida.
- Chemical alterations of DNA of adult sperm have the potential to contribute to permanent effects in offspring
 - Jenkins and Carrell, 2012a; Ouko et al., 2009
- A definitive causal link to AO exposure remains unconfirmed

The most commonly reported problems in children & grandchildren of VN vets exposed to AO (all vets)

- Birth defects
 - spina bifida
 - cleft palates
 - missing limbs
 - deformities of the limbs
 - heart deformities
- Hypothyroidism
- Stunted emotional development
- Cognitive disabilities

• Veteransguide.org

1 Is the percent of AO illness in SO descendants greater than that of VN vets as a whole?

- 30% higher incidence of birth defects in the children of Vietnam veterans with known exposure compared to those who were not exposed
 - Veterans Guide.org, revision 9/22/25
- The SO respondents to our study reported 37% (29/78) of children & grandchildren with a potential AO related illness
- Of those, 34.5% (10/29) had a VA recognized AO illness or condition

Spina Bifida

- the birth defect most strongly associated with Agent Orange exposure.
- Spina bifida occurs between the third and fourth weeks of pregnancy when the neural tube fails to close. It can cause mild to severe disabilities
- A veteran who conceived a child after military service in exposure areas during the Vietnam War era and whose child developed Spina Bifida Meningocele or Myelomeningocele, that child may be eligible for disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs

2 The most common conditions reported in our SO legacy children & grandchildren, out of 78

- Hyperthyroid -3
- Cardiomyopathy – 2
- Cancer, various types – 6.....types of cancer
- Stillborn – 5
 - While this is not a developed medical condition, it is significant with a history of exposure to AO

Regarding Stillbirth

- In the U.S. population today, stillbirth occurs in 1 in 175 births ($\approx 0.6\%$)
 - www.cdc.gov/stillbirth/data-research/index.html(2021)
- Among Vietnam veterans, some studies suggested the rate was slightly higher than this baseline
 - exact percentages varied depending on the population studied and the degree of AO exposure.
 - Vietnam veterans' children showed a slightly higher risk of stillbirth compared to non-Vietnam veterans, a modest elevation above the $\sim 0.6\%$ baseline.
 - Vietnam Experience Study, CDC, 1984-88
- Our study showed a considerable risk in SO VN vets at 6.4%
 - **All respondents indicated multiple AO exposure**

3 The relationship of stillborn children to VA recognized AO illnesses

- Our study found that of the five stillborn children reported, all had fathers with a VA recognized illness
 - Prostate cancer
 - Ischemic heart disease
 - Bladder cancer
 - Skin Cancer
 - Chronic lymphocytic leukemia

Call to Action - Spec Ops Veterans:

- VA offers disability compensation and benefits to children of veterans with certain conditions presumed to be caused by A O, with spina bifida being notably recognized.
- Enroll in the Agent Orange Registry
 - ensure your exposure history is **documented** and
 - receive a free health evaluation tailored to potential A O-related conditions
- Seek medical evaluation
 - identify any health issues early
 - file claims for benefits to access the support and compensation you deserve for service-related illnesses

For Female VN Vets – VA benefits if your child has birth defects

- The VA offers free health care, vocational training, and monthly compensation to eligible children with service-connected birth defects

Surviving Spouses and Children of AO exposed vets

- Surviving spouses and children of Veterans who died from a VA-rated, service-connected disability may be eligible for health care benefits under the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA).
- Survivors also may be eligible for CHAMPVA if the Veteran was rated permanently and totally disabled from a service-connected disability at the time of death.
 - To be eligible for CHAMPVA, you cannot be eligible for TRICARE/CHAMPUS

The battle continues

- Despite strong anecdotal evidence to support a link between Agent Orange exposure in Vietnam veterans and adverse effects in the offspring of exposed veterans, the United States government and the VA have yet to acknowledge a definitive link.

Conclusion

- Key Takeaways:

- The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Vietnamese and international research suggests that Agent Orange's dioxin can cause DNA damage across generations, affecting not only children but also grandchildren of exposed individuals
- Agent Orange exposure has had devastating health consequences for Vietnam veterans, particularly those in Special Operations
- Continued advocacy, research, and support are essential to address these challenges
- Document the illness of all involved
- Seek the assistance of a Veterans Service officer in documenting health problems of your children and grandchildren

Spec Ops VN veterans survey response

- Respondents with VA recognized AO illness
 - 66/78
- The most common illnesses in survey respondents (the vets themselves) in this study were:
 - DM- 15
 - Prostate Ca – 15
 - Ischemic heart disease – 13
 - Hypertension 12
 - **26/78 reported multiple conditions**