



Highlights of [GAO-03-437](#), a report to Congressional Committees

## DEFENSE HEALTH CARE

# Army Needs to Assess the Health Status of All Early-Deploying Reservists

### Why GAO Did This Study

During the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf War, health problems prevented the deployment of a significant number of Army reservists. To help correct this problem the Congress passed legislation that required reservists to undergo periodic physical and dental examinations. The National Defense Authorization Act for 2002 directed GAO to review the value and advisability of providing examinations. GAO also examined whether the Army is collecting and maintaining information on reservist health. GAO obtained expert opinion on the value of periodic examinations and visited seven Army reserve units to obtain information on the number of examinations that have been conducted.

### What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense ensure that for early-deploying reservists

- 5-year physical examinations for those under 40 and 2-year physical examinations for those over 40 are complete;
- annual medical certificates are complete and that they are reviewed by the Army; and
- annual dental examinations and needed treatments are complete.

DOD concurred with the recommendations.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-437](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-437).

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Marjorie E. Kanof at (202) 512-7101.

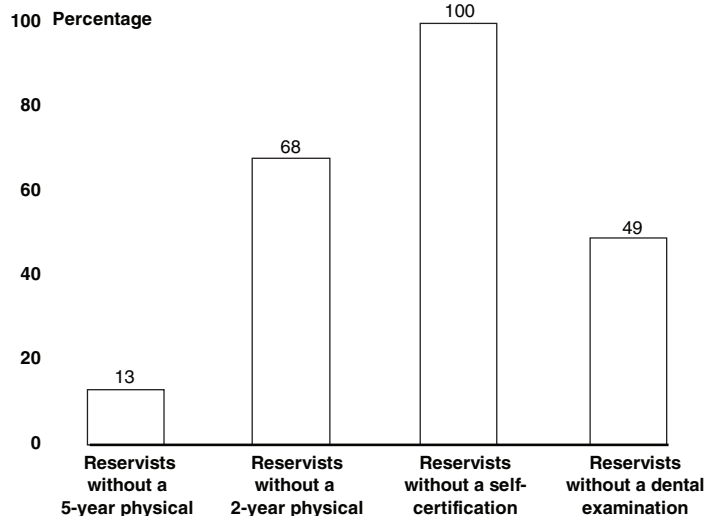
### What GAO Found

Medical experts recommend periodic physical and dental examinations as an effective means of assessing health. Periodic physical and dental examinations for early-deploying reservists provide a means for the Army to determine their health status. Army early-deploying reservists need to be healthy to meet the specific demands of their occupations; examinations and other health screenings can be used to identify those who cannot perform their assigned duties. Without adequate examinations, the Army may train, support, and mobilize reservists who are unfit for duty.

The Army has not consistently carried out the statutory requirements for monitoring the health and dental status of Army early-deploying reservists. At the early-deploying units GAO visited, approximately 66 percent of the medical records were available for review. For example, we found that about 68 percent of the required 2-year physical examinations for those over age 40 had not been performed and that none of the annual medical certificates required of reservists were completed by reservists and reviewed by the units.

The Army's automated health care information system does not contain comprehensive physical and dental information on early-deploying reservists. According to Army officials, in 2003 the Army plans to expand its system to maintain accurate and complete medical and dental information to monitor the health status of early-deploying reservists.

Site Visit Results for Seven U. S. Army Reserve Units



Source: GAO analysis of Army data.