

**OFFICE OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS (13)  
VHA, Washington, DC 20420**

<http://vaww.vhaco.va.gov/pubhealth/>

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**VA RADIATION PROGRAMS INFORMATION  
for  
Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Environmental Health Clinicians/  
Coordinators**

**The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides an array of services and benefits to certain veterans who were exposed to radiation while on active duty. To qualify for these, veterans who are exposed to radiation must meet very precise criteria that are based on Federal law or regulations.**

**Note: Refer to Attachment C for a table summarizing Special Eligibility Based on Radiation Exposure for “Atomic Veterans,” Other “Radiation Risk Activities,” NP Radium-Treated Veterans, and Other Types of Radiation Exposures.**

**1. "ATOMIC VETERANS"**

This unofficial term includes veterans who:

- Participated in atmospheric nuclear weapons tests;
- Took part in the American occupation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan (from August 6, 1945 through July 1, 1946); or
- Were POWs in Japan during WW II and thereby had an opportunity for exposure to ionizing radiation comparable to that of U.S. occupation forces in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

**(a) REGISTRY EXAMINATIONS**

“Atomic Veterans” are eligible to take part in VA’s Ionizing Radiation Registry examination program. These veterans do not need to be enrolled for general VA health care to be eligible to participate in the Registry program. Further, veterans are not subject to co-payments for registry examinations.

**(b) HEALTH CARE**

“Atomic Veterans” who participated in atmospheric nuclear weapons tests; took part in the American occupation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan (from August 6, 1945 through July 1, 1946) and/or were POWs in Japan during WW II and thereby had an opportunity for exposure to ionizing radiation comparable to that of U.S. occupation forces in Hiroshima and Nagasaki) are eligible for hospital care, medical services, and nursing home care for any disease suffered by the veteran that is a disease listed in section 1112(c)(2) of title 38, United States Code or any other disease for which the Secretary, based on the advice of the Advisory Committee on Environmental Hazards, determines that there is credible evidence of a positive association between occurrence of the disease in humans and exposure to ionizing radiation (see diseases listed in Attachments A and B below).

These veterans are eligible to enroll in VA’s health care system in Priority Category (6) based on their radiation-exposure. Accordingly, these veterans are not subject to co-payment requirements for care or services, (including outpatient pharmacy services) furnished to treat a covered disease,(see Attachments A & B below).

For further information regarding enrollment, VHA Directive 2003-003 describes VA Health Care Enrollment Priority Groups. (see web address:

<http://vaww.va.gov/publ/direc/health/direct/12003003.pdf> . The enrollment

priority groups can be accessed on the internet at:

<http://www.va.gov/elig/Priority%20Groups.htm>

Even if an eligible “Atomic Veteran” has never filed a compensation claim or if the claim has been denied, that veteran can still receive free health care, as resources permit, for the list of covered diseases

**(c) COMPENSATION**

VA also provides compensation for an Atomic Veteran's disability or death that had been service connected on either a "presumptive" or "non-presumptive" basis. (See below and Attachments A & B)

**2. VETERANS WHO PARTICIPATED IN OTHER "RADIATION-RISK ACTIVITIES"**

To ensure that veterans receive the same consideration as some civilian nuclear energy workers eligible for non-VA compensation programs, the VA expanded its definition of "radiation-risk activities" to include (in addition to Atomic Veterans) some veterans who:

- Served at gaseous diffusion plants in Paducah, Kentucky, Portsmouth, Ohio, and area K25 at Oak Ridge, Tennessee. (for a total of at least 250 days before February 1, 1992).
- Served before January 1, 1974, on Amchitka Island, Alaska and were thereby exposed to ionizing radiation in the performance of duty related to certain underground nuclear tests.

**(a) REGISTRY EXAMINATIONS**

Veterans who participated in these additional "radiation-risk activities" are eligible to take part in VA's Ionizing Radiation Registry examination program. These veterans do not need to be enrolled for general VA health care to be eligible to participate in the Registry program. Further, veterans are not subject to co-payments for registry examinations.

**(b) HEALTH CARE**

These veterans do not have special eligibility for VA health care or enrollment based on their participation in these additional "radiation-risk activities".

**(c) COMPENSATION**

VA provides compensation for a veteran's disability or death that had been service connected to participation to a "radiation-risk activity" on either a "presumptive" or "non-presumptive" basis. (See below and Attachments A & B)

**3. NASOPHARYNGEAL (NP) RADIUM-TREATED VETERANS**

This term includes veterans who received nasopharyngeal (NP) radium therapy while in active military, naval, or air service. More specifically, these treatments were administered to certain:

- Pilots, submariners, and divers to prevent ear damage from pressure changes; and
- Other service members.

**(a) REGISTRY EXAMINATION**

Veterans who received NP radium treatments in service are eligible to take part in VA's Ionizing Radiation Registry examination program. They do not have to enroll in VA's health care system to participate in the Registry program. Further, they are not subject to co-payments for the registry examinations.

**(b) HEALTH CARE**

**Cancers of Head and Neck**

These veterans are eligible for hospital care, medical services, and nursing home care needed to treat any cancer of the head or neck which VA finds may be associated with the veteran's receipt of NP radium treatments while in active

service. No co-payments apply to such care and services. Further, NP veterans do not have to enroll in VA's health care system to receive such care and services. These veterans are not eligible to be enrolled in Priority Category (6) on the basis of their NP radium exposure.

### **Other Health Conditions**

To receive health care for conditions other than the cancers described above, these veterans must enroll in VA's health care system, similar to any other veteran. Whether they are subject to co-payment requirements for VA care and services will depend on their particular eligibility and enrollment status.

Note: To be eligible for such care, there must be evidence of receipt of NP radium treatments in the veteran's service records. This documentation requirement does not apply, however, to those who served as aviators in the active military, naval, or air service before the end of the Korean conflict or who underwent submarine training in active naval service before January 1, 1965. See separate VA Fact Sheet on Nasopharyngeal Radium Therapy available on internet <http://www.va.gov/pressrel/99nasrad.htm> for more detailed information.

Even if an eligible NP veteran has never filed a compensation claim or if the claim has been denied, that veteran can still receive free health care, as resources permit, for treatment of head and neck cancers.

### **(c) COMPENSATION**

VA also provides compensation for NP veteran's disability or death related to NP radium therapy that has been service connected on a "non-presumptive" basis. (See below and Attachment B.)

## **4. OTHER VETERANS EXPOSED TO IONIZING RADIATION INCLUDING "OCCUPATIONAL" EXPOSURES**

This includes veterans who:

- Served in the nuclear Navy;
- Maintained nuclear weapons;
- Served as X-ray or dental technicians during military service;
- Participated in clean-ups after accidents involving nuclear weapons;
- Received X-ray therapy during military service; or
- Etc.

**(a) REGISTRY EXAMINATIONS**

These veterans are not eligible to take part in VA's Ionizing Radiation Registry (IRR) examination program. However, they can be offered comparable examinations if they have other eligibility, i.e., are enrolled for VA care. The results of their examinations would not be entered into the IRR database.

**(b) HEALTH CARE**

These veterans do not have any special eligibility for VA health care or enrollment based on exposure to ionizing radiation in these types of situations.

**(c) COMPENSATION**

These veterans are eligible for compensation for disability or death related to radiation exposure that has been service-connected on a "non-presumptive" basis (see below and Attachment B).

**5. OTHER INFORMATION**

**(a) RADIATION STATISTICS**

(1) About 195,000 service members participated in the post-World War II

occupation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, or were prisoners of war in Japan. Over 95 percent of them received doses below 0.1 rem, a standard measurement of radiation exposure. Only those Nagasaki occupation forces that regularly entered the Nishiyama area had the potential to receive doses up to 1 rem.

(2) In addition, approximately 210,000 service members took part in atmospheric nuclear tests between 1945 and 1962 in the United States, the Pacific and the Atlantic. Less than 1 percent of them received external doses greater than 5 rem per year, the current federal occupational radiation dose limit. The average external radiation dose received by participants was about 0.6 rem.

(3) The Defense Threat Reduction Agency's Nuclear Test Personnel Review program has maintained a database of participants in U.S. atmospheric nuclear test activities since 1978.

## **(b) DETERMINATION OF SERVICE CONNECTION**

**(1) Presumptive Basis for Service Connection.** “Atomic Veterans” and veterans who participated in other "radiation-risk activities" as defined above and their survivors are eligible for a presumption of service connection for cancers specified at 38 U.S.C. § 1112(c)(2) or 38 C.F.R. § 3.309(d)(2), as shown on Attachment A.

The 21 types of cancer for which a presumption of service connection exists are: all forms of leukemia except chronic lymphocytic leukemia; cancer of the thyroid, bone, brain, breast, colon, lung, ovary, pharynx, esophagus, stomach, small intestine, pancreas, bile ducts, gall bladder, salivary gland and urinary tract (kidneys, renal pelvis, ureter, urinary bladder and urethra); lymphomas (except Hodgkin's disease); multiple myeloma; primary liver cancer; and bronchio-alveolar carcinoma (a rare lung cancer).

**(2) Non-presumptive Service Connection** When a claim is filed for disability or death due to a disease other than the 21 cancers listed above and is claimed to be related to exposure to ionizing radiation while in the active military, naval, or air service and/or the veteran is not eligible for presumptive compensation, the claim must be evaluated to determine whether the disability or death can be service connected on a direct rather than presumptive basis. VA regulations provide that, in order to determine whether the disability or death is service connected, additional factors must be considered , including amount of radiation exposure, duration of exposure, and elapsed time between exposure and onset of disease.

For purposes of direct service connection for disability or death allegedly due to exposure to ionizing radiation, VA regulations define the term "radiogenic disease" to include all cancers as well as posterior subcapsular cataracts; non-malignant thyroid nodular disease; parathyroid adenoma; and tumors of the brain and central nervous system, as shown in Attachment B.

**c. CLAIMS FOR SERVICE-CONNECTION FOR DISEASES NOT ON THE VA'S "PRESUMPTIVE" OR "NON-PRESUMPTIVE" LISTS**

Veterans exposed to ionizing radiation also may submit claims with appropriate medical or scientific justification that diseases other than those on the VA's "presumptive" or "non-presumptive" lists were caused by radiation.

Such claims are adjudicated with consideration of dose and other factors as with claims for conditions on the "non-presumptive" list.

**d. SUBMISSION OF COMPENSATION CLAIMS**

Claims for VA compensation may be filed at a VA regional office or online at



[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov). Veterans or their survivors can reach a regional office by calling 1-800-827-1000. The Department of Defense maintains a toll-free helpline, 1-800-462-3683, to provide veterans with information about their test participation.

#### Rates of Disability Compensation

Monthly rates of compensation are set by Congress, depend upon the degree of disability and number of dependents, and follow a payment schedule that applies to all veterans. Current rates are listed in VA's handbook, "Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents." The rate tables are also available on the Web by following the compensation link at <http://www.va.gov/>

For deaths in 1993 and after, compensation to survivors is paid at a flat rate regardless of the deceased veteran's rank in the military. An additional amount may be paid if the veteran had been rated 100-percent disabled for service-connected disabilities for at least eight years before death and had been married to the surviving spouse during the same period. Additional amounts also may be paid to the surviving spouse for dependent minor children.

#### **e. IONIZING RADIATION REGISTRY PROGRAM STATISTICS**

As of March 2003 VA records show 22,890 veterans had received VA's Ionizing Radiation Registry examinations.

For questions, please contact the Office of Health and Environmental Hazards at (202) 273-8575.

## **ATTACHMENT A**

### **PRESUMPTIVE SERVICE CONNECTION:**

Bronchio-alveolar carcinoma (a rare lung cancer)

Cancer of the bile ducts

Cancer of the bone

Cancer of the brain

Cancer of the breast

Cancer of the colon

Cancer of the esophagus

Cancer of the gall bladder

Cancer of the small intestine

All forms of leukemia except chronic lymphocytic leukemia

Primary liver cancer

Cancer of the lung

Lymphomas (except Hodgkin's disease)

Multiple myeloma

Cancer of the ovary

Cancer of the pancreas

Cancer of the pharynx

Cancer of the salivary gland

Cancer of the stomach

Cancer of the thyroid

Cancer of the urinary tract (kidneys, renal pelvis, ureter, urinary bladder and urethra)

**ATTACHMENT B**

**"RADIOGENIC DISEASES" FOR PURPOSES OF NON-PRESUMPTIVE  
SERVICE CONNECTION:**

All cancers

Posterior subcapsular cataracts

Non-malignant thyroid nodular disease

Parathyroid adenoma

Tumors of the brain and central nervous system

**ATTACHMENT C**

**SPECIAL ELIGIBILITY BASED ON RADIATION EXPOSURE FOR:**

<b>CATEGORIES</b>	<b>IONIZING RADIATION EXAMINATION</b>	<b>PRIORITY 6 ENROLLMENT WITHOUT CO-PAYMENT</b>	<b>TREATMENT CANCER OF HEAD &amp; NECK. WITHOUT CO-PAYMENT</b>	<b>PRESUMPTIVE COMPENSATION</b>	<b>NON-PRESUMPTIVE COMPENSATION</b>
ATOMIC VETERANS	YES	YES	(INCLUDED IN PRIORITY 6 ENROLLMENT)	YES	YES
OTHER "RADIATION RISK ACTIVITIES"	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES
NP RADIUM-TREATED VETERANS	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
OTHER TYPES OF RADIATION EXPOSURES	NO*	NO	NO	NO	YES

\*--BUT COULD BE OFFERED COMPARABLE EXAMINATION IF ENROLLED FOR VA CARE.