

Depleted Uranium (DU) Fact Sheet

Information for veterans, their families and others about depleted uranium

Veterans Involved

- Gulf War veterans exposed to depleted uranium (DU) through friendly fire.
- Others potentially exposed to DU, including Bosnia, Gulf War, and OIF/OEF veterans.

What Is Depleted Uranium?

DU is a byproduct of the uranium enrichment process that makes nuclear fuel. DU has approximately 60 percent of the radioactivity and the same chemical toxicity as natural uranium, which is present in small amounts in our environment and to which we are all exposed through our food and water. In the early 1960s, the U.S. began testing DU for projectile use because of its ability to penetrate armor made with less dense metals. For more information visit the DU library at <http://fhp.osd.mil/du/>.

When Is Depleted Uranium Hazardous?

DU is a chemical and radiation health hazard primarily if internalized, such as through embedded fragments, contaminated wounds, and inhalation or ingestion. When a projectile made with DU penetrates a vehicle, small pieces of DU are created that can scatter and become embedded in muscle and soft tissue. In addition to DU wounds, soldiers exposed to DU in struck vehicles may inhale or swallow small airborne DU particles.

The potential for health effects from internal exposure is related to the amount of DU that enters a person's body. Simply riding in a vehicle with DU weapons or DU shielding will not expose a soldier to significant amounts of DU or external radiation. For more information on DU Health Effects, visit <http://fhp.osd.mil/du/healthEffects.jsp>. For Frequently Asked Questions, visit <http://fhp.osd.mil/du/faqs.jsp>.

Depleted Uranium Follow-Up Program

A VA Depleted Uranium Follow-up Program has been established at the Baltimore VA Medical Center to study health effects of DU exposure and to provide recommendations for treatment, including surgical removal of embedded fragments. The program for veterans exposed to DU from embedded fragments involves detailed physical exams and clinical tests of organ system function.

In addition, a screening program for other veterans concerned about DU exposure during combat involves an exposure questionnaire and a mail-in, 24-hour urine test for DU.

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If you think you were exposed to harmful Depleted Uranium conditions, such as being in a vehicle when it was struck by friendly fire or in a vehicle or building after it had been struck by friendly fire, and would like to be screened for DU exposure, contact the Department of Veterans Affairs medical center nearest you.

- Visit <http://www.va.gov/directory> to find the nearest VA medical center.
- Call 1-877-222-8387 to reach the nearest VA medical center.

For information on the DU Follow-Up Program visit www.publichealth/exposures/depleted_uranium/.

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Department of Veterans Affairs
Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards