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Exposure to Radiation during Military Service

Veterans who served in any of the following situations or circumstances may have been exposed to radiation.

If you are concerned about the health effects of radiation exposure during military service, talk to your health care provider or local [VA Environmental Health Coordinator](#).

Radiological cleanup of Enewetak Atoll

The U.S. conducted 43 nuclear tests on Enewetak Proving Ground at Enewetak Atoll from 1948 to 1958. Radiation at the test site was cleaned up from May 1977 - May 1980.

U.S. Air Force plutonium clean-up mission, Palomares, Spain

A nuclear weapons mishap occurred on January 17, 1966, over Palomares, Spain, when a United States Air Force (USAF) B-52 bomber and KC-135 tanker aircraft collided. The mishap led to the release of four nuclear weapons. Two of the weapons were damaged when they hit the ground and released plutonium, a radioactive material. There was no nuclear detonation. During the response, approximately 1,600 military and civilian personnel were potentially exposed to airborne dust and debris contaminated with plutonium.

Fukushima nuclear accident

Servicemembers may have been exposed to low doses of radiation in Japan from March 12 to May 11, 2011, following a nuclear accident on March 11, 2011.

Radiation-risk activity (includes "Atomic Veterans")

Activities include participation in nuclear weapons testing and the American occupation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Military occupational exposure

Various military occupations, such as nuclear weapons technicians and dental technicians, include routine and usually safe exposure to radiation.

Depleted uranium

During an explosion, pieces of depleted uranium used in tank armor and some bullets can scatter and embed in muscle and soft tissue.

LORAN radiation

U.S. Coast Guard Veterans who worked at LORAN (Long Range Navigation) stations from 1942 to 2010 may have been exposed to X-ray radiation from high voltage vacuum tubes.

McMurdo Station, Antarctica nuclear power plant

The U.S. Navy operated a small nuclear plant at the McMurdo Station, Antarctica, from 1964 to 1973. The nuclear plant was decommissioned after a leak was discovered.

Nasopharyngeal (nose and throat) radium irradiation treatments

Certain pilots, submariners, divers, and others were given this treatment during service in 1940 to the mid-1960s to prevent ear damage from pressure changes. These Veterans are eligible for a free [Ionizing Radiation Registry health exam](#).

Radiation therapy

Ionizing radiation can be used to treat disease, most commonly cancer.

[Learn how VA confirms radiation exposure during service.](#)

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RELATED BENEFITS

- [Registry Exam](#)
- [Health Care](#)
- [Disability Compensation](#)
- [Survivors' Benefits](#)
- [More »](#)



CONTACT

Health Care
877-222-8387

Benefits
800-827-1000

TDD (Hearing Impaired)
800-829-4833

QUICK LINKS

Hospital Locator

Zip Code

Health Programs

Protect Your Health

A-Z Health Topics



CONNECT

Veterans Crisis Line:
1-800-273-8255 (Press 1)



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RESOURCES

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- Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment
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- Plain Language
- Surviving Spouses & Dependents
- Adaptive Sports Program

ADMINISTRATION

- Veterans Health Administration
- Veterans Benefits Administration
- National Cemetery Administration