

VA Begins Paying Benefits for New Agent Orange Claims

VA Encourages Affected Vietnam Veterans to File Claims

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has begun distributing disability benefits to Vietnam Veterans who qualify for compensation under recently liberalized rules for Agent Orange exposure.

“The joint efforts of Congress and VA demonstrate a commitment to provide Vietnam Veterans with treatment and compensation for the long-term health effects of herbicide exposure,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki.

Up to 200,000 Vietnam Veterans are potentially eligible to receive VA disability compensation for medical conditions recently associated with Agent Orange. The expansion of coverage involves B-cell (or hairy-cell) leukemia, Parkinson’s disease and ischemic heart disease.

Shinseki said VA has launched a variety of initiatives – both technological and involving better business practices – to tackle an anticipated upsurge in Agent Orange-related claims.

“These initiatives show VA’s ongoing resolve to modernize its processes for handling claims through automation and improvements in doing business, providing Veterans with faster and more accurate decisions on their applications for benefits,” Shinseki said.

Providing initial payments – or increases to existing payments – to the 200,000 Veterans who now qualify for disability compensation for these three conditions is expected to take several months, but VA officials encourage all Vietnam Veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange and suffer from one of the three diseases to make sure their applications have been submitted.

VA has offered Veterans exposed to Agent Orange special access to health care since 1978, and priority medical care since 1981. VA has been providing disability compensation to Veterans with medical problems related to Agent Orange since 1985.

In practical terms, Veterans who served in Vietnam during the war and who have a “presumed” illness do not have to prove an association between their illnesses and their military service. This “presumption” simplifies and speeds up the application process for benefits.

The three new illnesses – B-cell (or hairy-cell) leukemia, Parkinson’s disease and ischemic heart disease – are added to the list of presumed illnesses previously recognized by VA.

Other recognized illnesses under VA's "presumption" rule for Agent Orange are:

- Acute and Subacute Transient Peripheral Neuropathy
- Chloracne
- Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia
- Diabetes Mellitus (Type 2)
- Hodgkin's Disease
- Multiple Myeloma
- Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma
- Porphyria Cutanea Tarda
- Prostate Cancer
- Respiratory Cancers
- Soft Tissue Sarcoma (other than Osteosarcoma, Chondrosarcoma, Kaposi's sarcoma, or Mesothelioma)
- AL Amyloidosis

Veterans interested in applying for disability compensation under one of the three new Agent Orange presumptives should go to www.fasttrack.va.gov or call 1-800-827-1000.