



## PUBLIC HEALTH

### Depleted Uranium

The U.S. military uses tank armor and some bullets made with depleted uranium (DU) to penetrate enemy armored vehicles, and began using DU on a large scale during the 1990-1991 Gulf War.

The process of manufacturing enriched uranium from natural uranium used in nuclear reactors or weapons leaves "depleted" uranium. DU has 40 percent less radioactivity, but the same chemical toxicity as natural uranium.

If you think you were exposed to depleted uranium during your military service, talk to your local [VA Environmental Health Coordinator](#). Ask to be screened for depleted uranium exposure, and ask about the [Depleted Uranium Follow-Up Program](#).

#### How Veterans may have been exposed to depleted uranium

When a projectile made with DU penetrates a vehicle, small pieces of DU can scatter and become embedded in muscle and soft tissue. In addition to DU in wounds, soldiers exposed to DU in struck vehicles may inhale or swallow small airborne DU particles.

Some Gulf War, Bosnia, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and Operation New Dawn (OND) Veterans who may have been exposed to DU are those who were: on, in or near vehicles hit with friendly fire; entering or near burning vehicles; near fires involving DU munitions; or salvaging damaged vehicles.

#### Health problems associated with depleted uranium

DU is a potential health hazard if it enters the body, such as through [embedded fragments](#), contaminated wounds, and inhalation or ingestion. Simply riding in a vehicle with DU weapons or DU shielding will not expose a service member to significant amounts of DU or external radiation.

The potential for health effects from internal exposure is related to the amount of DU that enters a person's body. If DU enters the body, it may remain in the body. Studies show high doses may especially affect the kidneys.

So far no health problems associated with DU exposure have been found in Veterans exposed to DU. Researchers and clinicians continue to monitor the health of these Veterans. Go to the [Department of Defense's Depleted Uranium \(DU\) Library](#) to learn about results of medical and scientific research and other DU topics.

#### Health concerns?

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

Veterans not enrolled in the VA health care system, [find out if you qualify for VA health care](#).

#### VA benefits

Veterans who served in the 1990-1991 Gulf War, Bosnia, OEF, OIF, or OND may be eligible for the [Depleted Uranium Follow-Up Program](#) at the Baltimore VA Medical Center, a program to screen and monitor health problems associated with depleted uranium exposure.

Veterans may be eligible for VA [disability compensation benefits](#) and [health care benefits](#) for health problems associated with depleted uranium in military service.

Veterans' dependents and survivors also may be eligible for benefits. Read [Federal Benefits for Veterans, Dependents and Survivors](#) to learn more.

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Reviewed/Updated Date: September 5, 2012