ABOUT GULF WAR VETERANS

• Nearly 700,000 men and women served in the Persian Gulf during Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm in the early 1990s.

• A prominent condition affecting Gulf War Veterans is a cluster of medically unexplained chronic symptoms that can include fatigue, headaches, joint pain, indigestion, insomnia, dizziness, respiratory disorders, skin problems, and memory impairment. These illnesses are referred to as chronic multisymptom illness or Gulf War illness (GWI).

• According to a 2020 DOD report, GWI is estimated to affect 175,000 to 250,000 Veterans who were deployed to the Gulf War theater from 1990 to 1991. Gulf War-era Veterans who were deployed continue to report poorer health than Veterans who served during the same period but were not deployed, 20 years after the war.

• VA has determined that nine infectious diseases are related to military service in Southwest Asia during the first Gulf War and Afghanistan: malaria, brucellosis, campylobacter jejuni, Coxiella burnettiid (Q fever), mycobacterium tuberculosis, nontyphoid salmonella, shigella, visceral leishmaniasis, and West Nile virus.

• VA also presumes certain chronic, unexplained symptoms to be connected to Gulf War service, such as chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, functional gastrointestinal disorders, and other undiagnosed illnesses.

VA RESEARCH ON GULF WAR VETERANS: OVERVIEW

• VA research efforts are guided by a strategic plan for Gulf War research developed with input from leading scientists, researchers, physicians, and Veterans themselves.

• VA investigators are conducting research in many areas important to Gulf War Veterans. These include studies on pain, autoimmune diseases, neurodegenerative diseases, sleep disorders, gastrointestinal disorders, respiratory problems, and other chronic diseases.

• The Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans’ Illnesses makes recommendations to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on proposed research and strategies related to understanding and treating the health consequences of military service in the Southwest Asia theater of operations during the 1990–1991 Gulf War.

• VA’s Longitudinal Health Study of Gulf War Era Veterans is one of the largest studies to examine the health of Veterans who served during the Gulf War. The study aims to compare changes in health over time for deployed and non-deployed Veterans from the Gulf War era. Approximately 30,000 Veterans took part in the original study.

• The VA Gulf War Era Cohort and Biorepository was established to learn more about health conditions affecting Veterans who served between 1990 and 1991. Members of the GWI cohort have completed a health survey and provided blood samples for DNA analysis.

SELECTED MILESTONES AND MAJOR EVENTS

1995 – Initiated the Longitudinal Health Study of Gulf War-era Veterans

2012 – Developed the first Gulf War research strategic plan

2016 – Published follow-up results for the second wave of the Longitudinal Health Study

2017 – Found evidence that Veterans with GWI might have greater mitochondrial DNA damage than Veterans without GWI

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