



Veterans Affairs

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Director

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HEPATITIS

Military Related Risk Factors

Hepatitis C is a blood-borne virus that attacks the liver. In 85% of all cases, the infection will last a lifetime. This puts the person at risk of developing cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, liver cancer, complete liver dysfunction and sometimes death. This condition can cause so much damage to a liver that a liver transplant is required.

The Hepatitis C infection may not be diagnosed for many years because there are no symptoms at first. It develops slowly in the liver causing cirrhosis. Hepatitis C kills about 5,000 Americans per year.

There are three major types of hepatitis, which are; A (HAV), B (HBV) and C (HCV). A and B have safe and effective vaccines and other treatments. Hepatitis C can be treated with varying levels of success, but there is no cure or vaccine.

Hepatitis A & B **cannot change** to Hepatitis C. They are entirely different strains of viral infections.

There has been considerable concern over the relationship between hepatitis C and immunization with jet injectors (air gun injection) in the military. The VA has admitted that infection from the use of these injectors is "Plausible", but the likelihood is so remote that it does not meet the evidentiary standard for service connection. A veteran would have to prove that the individual air gun used on him/her was contaminated with HCV and such records were not kept.

If you developed HCV in the service or within one year of discharge, service-connection is easily proved. Development of HAV or HBV can get you service-connection for those specific types of Hepatitis, if they are still active, and related by a doctor to the in service infection, but not for HCV.

Risk Factors for Hepatitis C

A number of risk factors help predict whether a person is at risk of hepatitis C; this doesn't mean that these factors cause the disease, just that they tend to occur more often in those with the disease than those without it. Some of these factors strictly prevent service connection because of laws in the military or because they are considered misconduct by the VA. Those are listed along with factors that can be rated as service-connected. Remember that you must prove that you had that risk factor and that the incident actually occurred.

- Exposure to someone's blood through contact with a bleeding wound, needle stick injury, etc.
- Intra-venous drug use (Considered misconduct by the VA)
- Blood transfusion or organ transplant before 1992 in the military
- Tattoos or body piercing (Prohibited by military law)
- Inhaled cocaine (Misconduct)
- Unprotected sex with multiple partners/ History of a sexually transmitted disease? (Misconduct)
- Abnormal liver function test while in the military

Although these are risk factors, some cannot be considered for service-connection. If you feel that you have had one or more of these risk factors, go to your nearest VA Hospital and get tested. If you test positive for HCV and have one or more of the risk factors that are not considered misconduct, contact our representatives about a claim for service-connection.

Veterans Affairs Office Locations:

- 222 W. Hospitality Lane, Third Floor, San Bernardino, CA 92415-0470 (909) 382-3290
- 15900 Smoke Tree Street, Hesperia, CA 92345 (760) 995-8010
- 8575 Haven Ave., Rancho Cucamonga, CA 91730 (909-948-6470
- **Or call Toll Free from anywhere in San Bernardino County : 1-866-4SBVets (1-866-472-8387)**