

## 1. Respiratory Conditions in the Armed Forces Community

Respiratory Conditions are not as well-known as other disease, injuries that the Armed Forces Community may have as a result of serving with the Armed Services.

The following fact sheet should help raise some awareness of the national and international findings, including data, understanding of possible causations, resultant diseases and entitlements and support able. Author: [Kate.parkin@nhs.net](mailto:Kate.parkin@nhs.net)

### 1.1 National Data

The British Lung Foundation's Battle for Breath - Report<sup>1,2</sup> of a 3 year epidemiological study into lung disease and levels of social deprivation. Overarching observations show:

- Lung cancer and COPD are considerably more common in the most deprived communities, due to their association with smoking.
- Outdoor air pollution, which is generally higher in deprived urban areas, is known to worsen symptoms of lung disease and can cause lung disease to develop - diesel is a classified carcinogen.
- Around 80% of mesothelioma cases occur in men. Those most at risk are people who have been exposed to asbestos while working in heavy industry or the armed forces.

More than 2,600 people are diagnosed with the mesothelioma each year in the UK. Most cases are diagnosed in people aged 60-80 and men are affected more commonly than women<sup>3</sup>.

HSE data shows that<sup>4</sup>:

- There were 2,595 mesothelioma deaths in Great Britain in 2016, broadly similar to the previous four years.
- The latest projections suggest that there will continue to be around 2,500 deaths per year for the rest of this current decade before annual numbers begin to decline.
- The continuing increase in annual mesothelioma deaths in recent years has been driven mainly by deaths among those aged 70 and above.
- In 2016 there were 2,197 male deaths and 398 female deaths, broadly similar to the annual numbers among males and females in the previous four years.

Earl Howe Minister of State, Ministry of Defence, stated: From 01/04/2003 to 30/09/2016 there have been 761 ex-service personnel with mesothelioma of these 721 are deceased<sup>5</sup>.

### 1.2 International Research

#### ***Increasing prevalence of Chronic Lung Disease in Veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan<sup>6</sup>***

Early reports from theatre and post deployment health assessments suggested an association with deployment-related exposures (e.g., sand, burn pits, chemical, etc.) and new-onset respiratory symptoms.

<sup>1</sup> British Lung Foundation (2016) The Battle for Breath - the impact of lung disease in the UK

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.blf.org.uk/sites/default/files/British%20Lung%20Foundation%20-%20Lung%20disease%20and%20health%20inequalities%20briefing.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/mesothelioma/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/mesothelioma/mesothelioma.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2017-01-17.HL4710.h&s=armed+forces+mesothelioma#HL4710.q0>

<sup>6</sup> Pugh et al Military Medicine 2016 May;181 (5) 476-81 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27136656>

Generalised estimating equations found significant increases over time for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and asthma in both unadjusted and adjusted analyses. Trends for interstitial lung disease were significant only in adjusted analyses. Age, smoking, and TBI were also significantly associated with chronic lung diseases; however, multiple deployments were not associated. Research is needed to identify which characteristics of deployment-related exposures are linked with chronic lung disease.

Veterans<sup>7</sup> are at triple the risk of developing chronic lung disease compared to the general population. Occupational lung disease can come from exposure to cigarette smoke, sand, dust, chemicals, airborne heavy metal and chemical particles from exploded munitions, aeroallergens found in desert regions and smoke from burn pits.

A 2012 study<sup>8</sup> by VA and DoD researchers with the Millennium Cohort Study found little evidence of increased respiratory risk for those who had served close to burn pits in Iraq, but the issue continues to be studied.

US Department of Veterans Affairs undertook a Study<sup>9</sup>: Iraq, Afghanistan Veterans at increased risk of respiratory illness August 26, 2014

A study involving more than 768,000 Veterans; the findings show that:

- 6 percent of Veterans who served in Iraq or Afghanistan and received VA care between 2002 and 2011 met criteria for one or more chronic pulmonary conditions, such as asthma, bronchitis, or emphysema.
- Another 10.5 percent met the criteria for chronic wheezing or coughing.
- There was an increase in the rates of illness over the 10-year period examined by the researchers.

Similar findings, drawn from the Millennium Cohort Study, the largest health care database in military history, showed that:

- 14 percent of military personnel who deployed reported chronic respiratory problems, compared with 10 percent among those who did not deploy.

Deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan have involved regular exposure to potentially dangerous particles in dust and sand, as well as inhalation of chemicals in fuel and exhaust.

What's more, according to Pugh, many Veterans either begin smoking cigarettes during a deployment or resume smoking after previously having quit. "Those with respiratory symptoms, asthma, and COPD were also more likely to smoke," says Pugh. "We need to carefully evaluate the role of smoking as well."

## **2. Respiratory Diseases**

### **2.1 Aetiology/Causes**

Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan were exposed to many irritants, including:

- Air pollution from burn pits and the burning of trash using jet fuel.
- Airborne explosive residue
- Aeroallergens such as date palm pollen
- Airborne sand and dust

All asbestos-related diseases typically take many years to develop so current statistics reflect the legacy of past working conditions.

<sup>7</sup> <https://lunginstitute.com/blog/veterans-lung-disease-know-facts/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22684321>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.research.va.gov/currents/summer2014/summer2014-24.cfm>

Mesothelioma is almost always caused by exposure to asbestos, a group of minerals made of microscopic fibres that used to be widely used in construction.

These tiny fibres can easily get in the lungs, where they get stuck, damaging the lungs over time. It usually takes a while for this to cause any obvious problems, with mesothelioma typically developing more than 20 years after exposure to asbestos.

Asbestos was widely used throughout the armed forces, particularly in construction and shipbuilding due to its excellent heat resistant properties and non-flammable nature.

Many MoD personnel have therefore come into direct contact with asbestos over the past 50 years<sup>10</sup>.

### Mesothelioma Can Affect All Branches of the Armed Forces<sup>11</sup>

Asbestos has been used over the years in various branches of the military, from shipbuilding to aircraft components. Its widespread use means that many military men and women have been exposed to the toxic material through ship and aircraft repair, or simply by being on board (if the asbestos fibres became airborne).

Asbestos was also used in the building of barracks, offices, and housing, so in addition to those in the navy and air force, other military personnel may have been exposed.

While many think that mesothelioma only affects veterans who fought in past wars like WWII or the Vietnam War, servicemen and women who fought in more recent wars, like the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, may have been exposed to asbestos and could be at risk of developing mesothelioma as well.

In addition, many older military vehicles, ships, and buildings may still contain asbestos. Widespread use of asbestos containing products in the past, particularly in the post-WWII building industry, led to a large increase in asbestos-related disease in Great Britain over the last few decades.

## 2.2 Mesothelioma

Mesothelioma is a type of cancer that develops in the lining that covers the outer surface of some of the body's organs. It's usually linked to asbestos exposure.

Mesothelioma mainly affects the lining of the lungs (pleural mesothelioma), although it can also affect the lining of the tummy (peritoneal mesothelioma), heart or testicles.

Pleural Mesothelioma is a particularly aggressive form of terminal cancer that affects the 'pleura' of the lungs. The cancer can take decades to materialise but, once diagnosed, most sufferers will have a life expectancy of only one to two years. More information about Mesothelioma can be found on the [NHS website](#)<sup>12</sup>.

Unfortunately it's rarely possible to cure mesothelioma, although treatment can help control the symptoms.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.nationalasbestos.co.uk/armed-forces-exposure/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://mesotheliomaresearchnews.com/2017/06/20/veterans-and-mesothelioma/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/mesothelioma/>

### 2.3 Non-malignant pleural disease

Non-malignant pleural disease<sup>13</sup> is a non-cancerous condition affecting the outer lining of the lung (the pleura). It includes two forms of disease: diffuse pleural thickening and the less serious pleural plaques. A substantial number of cases continue to occur each year in Great Britain, mainly due to workplace asbestos exposures many years ago.

- There were 370 new cases of pleural thickening assessed for Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit in 2016. (See table IDB01 [www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/iidb01.xlsx](http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/iidb01.xlsx))
- The annual number has been fairly constant over the last 10 years, with an average of around 430 new cases per year of which around 10% are female.

## 3. Support for Armed Forces Community

### 3.1 Compensation – Mesothelioma (140k)

All veterans diagnosed with Mesothelioma as a result of Service will have the choice between receiving a traditional War Pension or £140,000 in lump sum compensation, regardless of age at diagnosis<sup>14</sup>.

Traditionally veterans suffering an injury or illness caused before 1987 could not sue the Ministry of Defence (MOD). This is because of the doctrine known as Crown Immunity. In certain cases, it may be possible for a veteran to claim compensation for past exposure to asbestos dust and we recommend that ex-service men and women contact Royal British Legion or Veterans UK for further information.

In 2014, the Government set up the Diffuse Mesothelioma Scheme<sup>15</sup> to pay lump sum compensation to civilians who had contracted Mesothelioma but are unable to trace their employer or insurance company. The introduction of the scheme exposed the fact that, because life expectancy is so short, unmarried or widowed veterans stood to receive far less compensation than their civilian counterparts. This is because veterans are unable to sue the Government for injuries or illnesses sustained before 1987 and could instead; only apply for a War Disablement Pension. This scheme can't award large lump sum payments to those recently diagnosed with terminal illnesses.

From April 2016 veterans diagnosed with mesothelioma as a result of exposure to asbestos during their service in the army, navy and air force are entitled to compensation.

Originally the Government's announcement only benefited those veterans who applied for compensation after 16 December 2015 and not those veterans already diagnosed with the disease. The Legion expressed its disappointment to officials that those veterans living with Mesothelioma today (around 60) weren't included in the changes. Following a review the Government has extended eligibility to all veterans.

Now any ex-service personnel diagnosed with mesothelioma who were exposed to asbestos during service are eligible for a lump sum compensation of £140,000 under the Mesothelioma Act 2014, or a War Pension.

### 3.2 War Pensions – standard for all other respiratory conditions as with any injury

Veterans will not be able to claim compensation for other asbestos-related diseases, such as asbestosis, pleural thickening and lung cancer.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/asbestosis/asbestos-related-disease.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/campaign/asbestos-related-cancer-and-the-military/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.mesoscheme.org.uk/>

### 3.3 RBL and Veterans UK – Access

The MOD's [Veterans Welfare Service](#)<sup>16</sup> will contact all existing claimants to explain the new compensation option and help them understand the choices available to them. Veterans with mesothelioma who are yet to make a claim should contact Veterans UK on 0808 1914 218 or [visit their website](#).

### 3.4 Nurses

Mesothelioma UK<sup>17</sup> has launched a specialist, UK-wide service for armed forces personnel and veterans who have been affected by mesothelioma. This new service is called 'Mesothelioma UK - Supporting our Armed Forces'. The Specialist Nurses can be found in Southampton and Tunbridge Wells.

Development of the service is supported by Government funding from fines levied on the banking industry for manipulating the LIBOR rate (the London inter-bank lending rate). Mesothelioma UK - Supporting our Armed Forces aim to raise awareness of the disease and establish a comprehensive shared approach to providing mesothelioma information and support for armed forces personnel and veterans.

They have developed and deliver a range of information resources to raise awareness of the disease within the Armed Forces and military personnel community. They are undertaking a comprehensive research programme that will collate all available data to quantify and describe the mesothelioma burden among the Armed Forces and also explore the experience of Armed Forces personnel in relation to mesothelioma.

### 3.5 Facebook Group



[You can ask to join the dedicated Mesothelioma UK Armed Forces Facebook group.](#)

[www.facebook.com/groups/mesoukarmedforces](http://www.facebook.com/groups/mesoukarmedforces)

## 4. Disease Groups/Associations/Charities Links

### 4.1 National

<b>National Asbestos</b> <a href="https://www.nationalasbestos.co.uk/armed-forces-exposure/">https://www.nationalasbestos.co.uk/armed-forces-exposure/</a>	If you would like further information on MoD claims, or war pensions, please contact National Asbestos on 0808 163 3705 or <a href="#">click here...</a>
<b>British Lung Foundation</b> <a href="https://www.blf.org.uk">https://www.blf.org.uk</a>	Tel: 03000 030 555 Monday to Friday, 09:00 – 17:00, calls will cost the same as a local call.
<b>Mesothelioma UK</b> <a href="https://www.mesothelioma.uk.com/about-us/what-we-fund/mesothelioma-uk-armed-forces-project/">https://www.mesothelioma.uk.com/about-us/what-we-fund/mesothelioma-uk-armed-forces-project/</a>	Tel: 0800 169 2409 Email: <a href="mailto:info@mesothelioma.uk.com">info@mesothelioma.uk.com</a> A selection of leaflets are available through the website
<b>Veterans UK</b> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk">https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk</a>	Helpline 0808 1914218, 08:00 – 17:00

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/veterans-welfare-service>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.mesothelioma.uk.com/about-us/what-we-fund/mesothelioma-uk-armed-forces-project/>

**Veterans Welfare Service**

Local branch is Centurion (London, SE and SW England) Tel 02392 702232  
 Email: veterans-uk-vws-south@mod.uk  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/veterans-welfare-service>

**You may find the following links useful:**

- [Asbestos Victims Support Forum UK \(AVSGF-UK\)](#) – call 0161 636 7555
- [Cancer Research UK: mesothelioma](#) – call 0808 800 4040
- [Hampshire Asbestos Support Awareness Group \(HASAG\)](#) – call 02380 010 015 for support in the South of England, South East, London or the Home Counties

**4.2 International**

**Asbestos.com**  
<https://www.asbestos.com/veterans/>  
  
 Brought to you by The Mesothelioma Center

Has a very good website with some interesting information on where Military occupations and Asbestos Exposure though focused on the US Veterans.

For example it shows where contamination is on Navy Ships - Asbestos contamination was not limited to one specific class of vessel. Asbestos was found in everything from destroyers to aircraft carriers.

**Mesothelioma Guide**  
<https://www.mesotheliomaguide.com/veterans/>  


It has information about Mesothelioma and where Veterans may have been exposed to Asbestos. It also has on the website how USA Veterans can get compensation. It has free Guide Packets.

