

## Reproductive Health and Military Deployment

Information for Service Members and Families

### Important Facts about Reproductive Health

- The Department of Defense is committed to protecting the health of all Service members and their families.
- Currently, scientific studies do not indicate an increased risk of reproductive health problems, including birth defects, in Service members following deployment.
- Public health efforts are ongoing to identify and prevent potential reproductive health problems that could be associated with deployments.

### What is reproductive health?

Reproductive health includes the ability to conceive children (also known as fertility), have healthy full-term pregnancies, and healthy infants. The spectrum of reproductive health can also address sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and reproductive tract cancers.

### Is reproductive health a concern for women only?

No. Reproductive health is a concern for both men and women, although there may be important differences in specific concerns and health problems between men and women.

### Why is reproductive health a concern for some military members?

Some Service members have been concerned that their environment, job-related exposures, or medical countermeasures may harm their reproductive health. "Exposures" encountered during deployments can include occupational and environmental exposures (for example, cold, excessive heat, solvents, depleted uranium, radiation, smoke) and medical countermeasures (for example, vaccines, nerve agent antidotes, pesticides, and antibiotics). In addition to deployment-related exposures, there are others that can impact reproductive health, such as STDs, alcohol and tobacco use, and some medications. To protect pregnant military members, an occupational history is taken to assess potential exposures related to the member's occupational

specialty and determine if changes need to be made to restrict exposures.

### What is known about reproductive health and occupational and environmental exposures?

Reproductive health covers a broad range of topics. What is known for each one varies. Based on the latest scientific studies this is what is currently known:

**Infertility:** While some of the mechanisms of infertility (reduced ability to conceive children) are well understood (for example, low sperm count or failure to ovulate) the causes are often unknown. Certain STDs may cause infertility, particularly in women. To date, research has not confirmed a decrease in fertility in Service members after military deployment. It is notable that greater than 90,000 infants are born to military families each year with "baby booms" of increased births observed after every major deployment, suggesting that many couples have no problems with fertility.

**Pregnancy losses:** Normal or expected rates of pregnancy loss among Service members following deployments have been observed and are comparable to those in the civilian population. For a variety of reasons, pregnancy losses (including miscarriages) are difficult to identify, especially early in pregnancy. Pregnancy losses are extremely common and may happen in as many as one-third of all pregnancies. The causes are usually unknown but can include infections, birth defects, nutritional problems, and other maternal health problems.

**Birth defects:** Studies do not indicate increased rates of birth defects among infants born following parental military deployment. Approximately 3-5% of all infants born in the United States (civilian and military) are diagnosed with a major birth defect. About 70% of birth defects have no known cause.

**Other infant health problems:** There have been no increases identified in infant cancer or developmental problems (such as autism) related to parental military service.



Others: Studies have not indicated increased reproductive tract cancers or other chronic reproductive problems related to military service.

### What are public health professionals doing to learn more about reproductive health in Service members?

The US military established the DoD Birth and Infant Health Registry to monitor some important reproductive health outcomes of military families. Infants born to military families are identified through detailed surveillance of all healthcare records in the first year of life. Efforts include analyzing

associations between infant health outcomes and parental exposures. Specific areas of research include birth defects, infant cancers, the impact of specific vaccines, and other reproductive outcomes following OIF/OEF deployment. Military public health professionals collaborate with other agencies, such as the National Birth Defects Prevention Network, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and numerous universities, in conducting research and surveillance on these important issues.

### Where Do I Get More Information?

#### DoD Deployment Health Clinical Center (DHCC)

Phone: (866) 559-1627

<http://www.pdhealth.mil/>

#### U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (USACHPPM)

Phone: (800) 222-9698

<http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil>

#### Air Force Institute for Operational Health (AFIOH)

Phone: (888) 232-3764

<http://www.brooks.af.mil/afioh/>

#### DoD Force Health Protection and Readiness (FHP&R)

Phone: (800) 497-6261

<https://fhp.osd.mil>

#### Navy Environmental Health Center (NEHC)

Phone: (757) 953-0700

<http://www-nehc.med.navy.mil>

#### CDC National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/>

#### Other Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) resources

<http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/DRH/>

#### DoD Birth and Infant Health Registry\*

Phone: 619-553-9255, DSN 553-9255

Email: [NHRC-birthregistry@med.navy.mil](mailto:NHRC-birthregistry@med.navy.mil)

<http://www.nhrc.navy.mil/rsch/department164/projects/birthdefects.htm>

\*Note this is the same contact information for the National Smallpox Vaccine in Pregnancy Registry

#### National Institutes of Health (NIH) Center for the Evaluation of Risks to Human Reproduction

<http://cerhr.niehs.nih.gov/>

**Your Suggestions:** [http://deploymenthealthlibrary.fhp.osd.mil/product\\_feedback.jsp](http://deploymenthealthlibrary.fhp.osd.mil/product_feedback.jsp)



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A collaborative effort between the Air Force Institute for Operational Health, the Deployment Health Clinical Center, Force Health Protection and Readiness, the Navy Environmental Health Center, the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine, and the OUSD(P&R)/Military Family and Community Policy