

Quick Tips for Providers: Evaluating Patients Exposed to Airborne Hazards



While deployed, military service members may have been exposed to a variety of airborne hazards. “Airborne hazard” refers to air contaminants or potentially toxic substances that we are exposed to through the air we breathe, including the smoke and fumes generated by open burn pits. As a military health care provider, patients may request your assistance in addressing symptoms or concerns that could be associated with such military environmental exposures.

Deployment and Exposure Considerations

QUESTIONS REGARDING DEPLOYMENT HISTORY: Did you deploy? Where? When? For how long?

QUESTIONS REGARDING EXPOSURES:

- Did you have any exposures to any toxic substances that you are aware of? What were they?
- What type of pollution were you exposed to during deployment (e.g., off-base pollution such as factories, cars, burning trash, or dust; or on-base pollution such as burning fuel or burn pits)?
- What do you recall as the extent of your exposure in terms of hours/day, and number of weeks or months?
- What airborne pollutants have you been exposed to outside of deployment?

CONSIDER whether symptoms are active or inactive and whether active symptoms are acute or chronic.

ACCESS AND REVIEW patient's health assessment forms in the Electronic Health Record.

ENSURE that all questions from patients and their family members about exposures, diagnoses, exam findings, and ancillary test findings (including negative results) are addressed and documented in their Electronic Health Record.

IDENTIFY AND CONSIDER OTHER RISK FACTORS that may be present such as health history, past or current cigarette smoking, civilian occupational exposures, hobbies, lifestyle, and other inhalation exposures that can complicate causal attribution.

Potential Specialty Evaluations



Ear, Nose, Throat

Assessment of vocal cord dysfunction, sinuses



Cardiology

Clinical Evaluation, Stress Test, Echocardiogram



Gastroenterology

EGD or Upper Endoscopy



Pulmonary

High-resolution chest computed tomography (CT) scan, Lung biopsy



Allergy and Immunology

Allergen Testing

Treat the Patient, Not the Exposure – Your Role as The Provider

The purpose of this targeted health care encounter is for active-duty service members to get their health concerns related to airborne hazards addressed and have it documented in their electronic health record.

- Listen to the patient's concerns, using health-risk communication principles, of trust, credibility, and rapport, to assess their understanding of past environmental exposures and their level of concern.
- Understand that there may be uncertainties related to the extent of exposure (dose concentration, duration, time), possible health effects, diagnostic confidence, health management options, and prognosis. Empathy and avoidance of conflict are imperative.
- Conduct a patient-centered evaluation and create a management plan that builds upon patient and family engagement and is respectful, educational, transparent, and emotionally supportive.
 - Focus on environmental exposure-related patient health concerns, complaints, and symptoms with attention to HEENT, Heart, Lungs, Abdomen, Neurologic (+/- MSE, Musculoskeletal and Dermatologic)
- Refer patient for SPECIALTY CONSULTATION if a patient has complex, difficult-to-diagnose, or medically unexplained symptoms or health concerns associated with deployment-related exposures that could not be diagnosed by you or your team.
 - No specific ancillary tests are required, unless clinically indicated
 - Specialty evaluations should be ordered in the context of the patient's symptoms, your exam findings, patient's concerns, and the professional judgment and comfort level of the primary care team

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Diagnostic Codes

When conducting the medical exam, providers should annotate the clinical record with the following:

- ICD-10 codes Z91.82 (personal history of military deployment) and X08.8 (exposure to other specified, smoke, fire, and flames)
- In the Military Health system GENESIS, SNOMED-CT codes 304 258 5015 (history of military deployment) and 165 638 013 (exposure to environmental pollution, occupational)
- Any additional applicable diagnostic codes from the list below:

- Use the following International Classification of Disease (ICD) 10 codes:
 - Z65.5: Exposure to combat
 - Z57.39: Occupational exposure to air contaminants
 - Z57.5: Occupational exposure to toxic agents in other industries
 - Z77.1: Contact with and (suspected) exposure to environmental pollution and hazards in the physical environment
 - Z77.098: Contact with and (suspected) exposure to other hazardous chemicals
 - Z77.110: Contact with and (suspected) exposure to air pollution
 - Z77.112: Contact with and (suspected) exposure to soil pollution
 - Z77.118: Contact with and (suspected) exposure to other environmental pollution
 - Z77.128: Exposure to environmental contaminants
- In Military Health System (MHS) GENESIS, use the following Systemized Nomenclature of Medicine- Clinical Terms (SNOMED-CT) codes:
 - SCTID 102421000: Exposure to environmental pollution
 - SCTID 102413006: Polluted air / Air pollution (event)
 - SCTID 102411008: Environmental pollution
 - SCTID 102422007: Exposure to environmental pollution, occupational
 - SCTID 102423002: Exposure to environmental pollution, non-occupational
- Any additional applicable diagnostic or symptom codes

Training and Resources

- Go to <https://jkodirect.jten.mil> to search for and enroll in the DHA-US035 Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry Overview training course for providers.
- Go to [Health.mil/AHBurnPitRegistry](https://health.mil/AHBurnPitRegistry) to access multiple provider resources including the DoD Healthcare Provider Clinical Toolbox.
- Providers can access patient information in the Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record (ILER). Access ILER training at <https://jkodirect.jten.mil/Atlas2/page/login/Login.jsf> and you can also access an ILER fact sheet at (<https://health.mil/Reference-Center/Fact-Sheets/2023/07/24/ILER>).
- Go to the War Related Illness and Injury Study Center (WRIISC) at <https://www.warrelatedillness.va.gov> for specific topic areas and for their factsheets visit <https://www.warrelatedillness.va.gov/education/factsheets.asp>