

Study Shows Higher Risk of Brain Cancer Among Post 9/11 Veterans

A report published earlier this year examined more than 1.9 million Afghanistan and Iraq war veterans and investigated the correlation between TBIs and brain cancer

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A study published in February found patients with moderate, severe or “penetrating” TBIs are at a higher risk of developing brain cancer.

The study, titled *Traumatic Brain Injury and Subsequent Risk of Brain Cancer in US Veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars* and published by the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, took place from Oct. 1, 2004, to Sept. 20, 2019. It included 1,919,740 veterans.

Of those in the study, 449,880 veterans endured TBIs. Veterans with moderate and severe TBIs had a nearly 90 percent increased risk of brain cancer than those with mild TBIs or none. Researchers found that moderate, severe and penetrating (a break in the skull) TBIs were associated with an increased risk of subsequent brain cancer among Post 9/11 veterans.

More than 80 percent of those in the study were male, and about 63 percent of all who were examined were non-Hispanic white people, with 31 years old being the median age. To be considered for the study, participants must have received health care for three years with the Department of Defense and two years with VA.

“A history of TBI is common in post-9/11 era veterans, with 20 percent who served in Iraq and Afghanistan experiencing a TBI in the course of their service,” researchers stated. “Furthermore, TBI has been associated with poor long-term outcomes in the veteran population, including cardiovascular disease, dementia, epilepsy and poor mental health outcomes.”

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Researchers said that while brain cancer is rare, about 0.02 percent of the group with no TBI or mild TBI developed brain cancer. Of those with moderate and severe TBIs, about 0.04 percent developed brain cancer. Brain cancer was found in 0.06 percent of veterans who sustained a penetrating TBI.

“While the absolute number of brain cancer diagnoses was small, these diagnoses are associated with profoundly poor outcomes,” researchers said.

In the report, researchers emphasized the need for further research, including the long-term health impacts of TBIs.

“Given that TBI is a common injury incurred in the course of military service, further research of this rare but devastating condition is needed to better identify those at risk and develop screening protocols.”

VFW National Veterans Service Director Michael Figlioli said that VFW continues to monitor reports about downstream effects related to exposures, acoustic traumas and other potential injuries or illnesses associated with deployment to combat zones and enemy engagement.

“Whether the study is from the VA, DOD or outside expert, any and all potential consequences of service need to be examined,” Figlioli said. “If there is a link between such service and an incurred illness or injury, VFW will work at the highest levels to make sure VA provides the appropriate amount of care and benefits service members are entitled to.”

This article is featured in the 2024 August issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Dave Spiva](#), associate editor for VFW magazine.