



DEFENSE HEALTH CARE

Army Has Not Consistently Assessed the Health Status of Early-Deploying Reservists

Highlights of [GAO-03-997T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Committee on Veterans' Affairs, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

During the 1990-91 Persian Gulf War, health problems prevented the deployment of a significant number of Army reservists. As required by the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2002, GAO reported on the Army's efforts to assess the health status of its early-deploying reservists (*Defense Health Care: Army Needs to Assess the Health Status of All Early-Deploying Reservists* [[GAO-03-437](#), Apr. 15, 2003]).

GAO was asked to testify on its findings on the Army's health status assessments efforts and the implications of those assessments for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Specifically, GAO was asked to determine if the Army is collecting and maintaining information on reservists' health and review the value and advisability of providing examinations. For its report, GAO reviewed medical records at seven Army early-deploying reserve units to determine the number of required examinations that have been conducted and obtained expert opinion on the value of periodic examinations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-997T.

To view the full testimony statement, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Marjorie E. Kanof at (202) 512-7101.

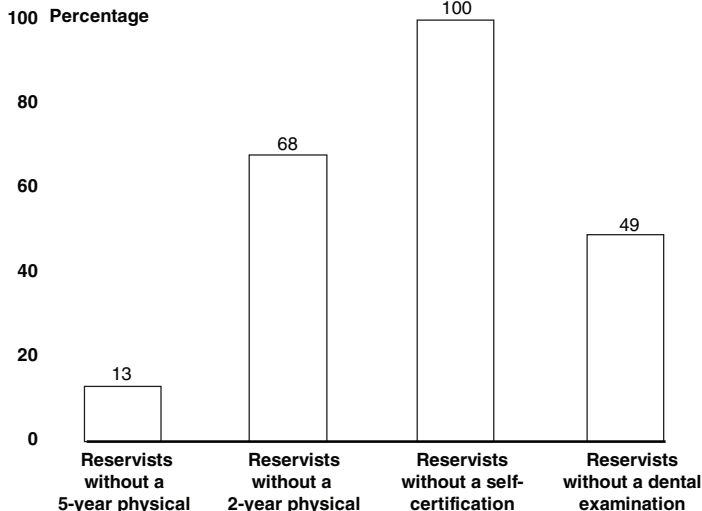
What GAO Found

The Army has not consistently carried out the statutory requirements for monitoring the health and dental status of its early-deploying reservists. As a result, the Army does not have sufficient information to know how many reservists can perform their assigned duties and are ready for deployment. At reserve units GAO visited, approximately 66 percent of the medical records were available for review. At those locations, GAO found that about 13 percent of the 5-year physical examinations had not been performed, about 49 percent of early-deploying reservists lacked current dental examinations, and none of the annual medical certificates required of reservists were completed by them and reviewed by the units.

Medical experts recommend periodic physical and dental examinations as an effective means of assessing health. Army early-deploying reservists need to be healthy to meet the specific demands of their occupations; examinations and other health screenings can be used to identify those who cannot perform their assigned duties. Without adequate examinations, the Army may train, support, and mobilize reservists who are unfit for duty.

DOD concurred with GAO's recommendations to comply with statutory requirements to conduct medical and dental examinations and provide dental treatment. VA's ability to perform its missions to provide medical care to veterans and compensate them for their service-connected disabilities could be hampered if the Army's medical surveillance system contains inadequate or incomplete information.

Site Visit Results for Seven U. S. Army Reserve Units



Source: GAO analysis of Army data.