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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**NEW REVIEW SUGGESTS POSSIBLE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN AGENT ORANGE AND ADULT-ONSET DIABETES**

WASHINGTON -- New evidence supports the possibility of an association between chemicals used in herbicides during the Vietnam War and adult-onset (Type 2) diabetes, but it stops short of making a clear link, says a new report from the Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the National Academies. The report is the latest in a series examining the impact of Agent Orange on veterans' health.

Using the latest scientific studies, the committee that wrote the report re-evaluated whether exposure to the chemical defoliant Agent Orange and other herbicides used in Vietnam, some of which contained dioxin, was linked in any way with the development of adult-onset diabetes. The re-evaluation found new "limited or suggestive" evidence of an association, but the finding is not conclusive. Previous IOM reports had said that there was "inadequate or insufficient" evidence to determine whether a link existed.

Type 2 diabetes occurs when something goes wrong with the way that insulin is produced or used in the body. Increased sugar levels in the blood and urine, excessive thirst, and frequent urination characterize the disease. Over time, high sugar levels may cause damage to the eyes, kidneys, nervous system, or heart.

"Research findings that have now accumulated over a long period of time seem to support the possibility of a link between Agent Orange exposure and Type 2 diabetes," said committee chair David Tollerud, professor of public health and director, Center for Environmental and Occupational Health, MCP Hahnemann University School of Public Health, Philadelphia. "It must be emphasized, however, that any increased danger from herbicide or dioxin exposure appears to be small. The known predictors of diabetes risk - family history, physical inactivity, and obesity - continue to greatly outweigh any suggested increased risk from wartime exposure to herbicides."

A classification of "limited or suggestive" means that while there is evidence suggestive of an association between exposure and disease, the evidence is not conclusive enough to say definitively that chance or other factors did not influence the results of the studies that were evaluated, or that the studies have isolated all of the variables that could have affected the outcome. Although there is a plausible link between dioxin exposure and biologic changes associated with diabetes, the committee did not find that dioxin exposure leads to diabetes.

The ability of researchers to pinpoint the health risks faced by veterans is hampered by inadequate information about exposure levels of troops in Vietnam. Some of the evidence reviewed by the committee comes from evaluations of Air Force and Army troops who worked with herbicides. Most information, however, is from studies of people who were exposed to herbicides on the job or in industrial accidents. Although most veterans probably experienced lower levels of exposure than those who worked with the chemicals over long periods in occupational or agricultural settings, it is difficult to say precisely which troops may have encountered higher levels.

U.S. forces sprayed Agent Orange and other defoliants over parts of south Vietnam beginning in 1962. Most large-scale sprayings were conducted using airplanes and helicopters, but considerable quantities of herbicides were dispersed from boats and ground vehicles or by soldiers wearing back-mounted equipment. A 1969 scientific report concluded that one of the primary chemicals used in Agent Orange could cause birth defects in laboratory animals. The U.S. military therefore suspended the use of Agent Orange in 1970 and halted all herbicide spraying in Vietnam the following year.

The committee's work was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The Institute of Medicine is a private, nonprofit institution that provides health policy advice under a congressional charter granted to the National Academy of Sciences. A committee roster follows.

Read the full text of [VETERANS AND AGENT ORANGE: HERBICIDE/DIOXIN EXPOSURE AND DIABETES](#) for free on the Web, as well as more than 1,800 other publications from the National Academies. Printed copies are available for purchase from the [National Academy Press Web site](#) or at the mailing address in the letterhead; tel. (202) 334-3313 or 1-800-624-6242. Reporters may obtain a pre-publication copy from the Office of News and Public Information at the letterhead address (contacts listed above).

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