



Online Survey of NYC Metro Area Veterans & Families: Concerns about COVID-19

Over approximately 48 hours from March 19-21, NYC Metro area veterans, military members, spouses, caregivers, and Gold Star Family members were asked for their feedback on the COVID-19 emergency

Key Findings

- Over 2 days, 208 respondents from the NYC Metro area veterans community responded with their input on the COVID-19 emergency
- 68% of respondents reported experiencing toxic exposures unique to their military service which are known to cause respiratory conditions ranging from mild to fatal, and numerous other conditions. Of these respondents, 62% indicated their belief that these toxic exposures make them more vulnerable to COVID-19.
- 40% of survey respondents said their top concern is that they or their spouse/partner will get sick.
- 20% of survey respondents said their top concern is that they have already lost or will lose their financial security, housing, job, or business.
- 22% of survey respondents expressed that cash assistance, housing assistance, and jobs assistance are needed right now to help veterans and their families.
- 17% of survey respondents expressed an immediate need for financial assistance, food, supplies, or information.

About NYC Veterans Alliance:

NYC Veterans Alliance is a member-driven, grassroots policy advocacy and community-building organization that connects, advocates for, and empowers veterans and their family members to make change as civic leaders.

About the Survey

- Created by NYC Veterans Alliance using SurveyMonkey
- Launched on the afternoon of March 19, 2020
- Promoted via email and social media
- Closed to responses the evening of March 21, 2020
- Survey asked 10 questions
- 208 individuals completed the survey
- Responses were anonymous

About This Report

- This report is our best effort to present survey findings quickly, fairly, accurately, and succinctly based on our current staffing capacity and resources
- Some responses have been summarized within broader categories
- No responses were omitted or changed
- 100% of funding to produce this survey, report, and responsiveness to veterans and families in need has come from our members and supporters from within our community. If you would like to help sustain our ongoing work, please go to nycveteransalliance.org/donate

Note: NYC Veterans Alliance sincerely thanks all 208 veterans, military members, and loved ones who took the time to share their thoughts, concerns, ideas, needs, and input in this survey. We invite anyone with immediate needs to contact us at hello@nycveteransalliance.org or 929-265-4549. We will do our best to connect you with help.

**Please visit and share
our comprehensive listing of COVID-19 resources
for veterans & families at:**

https://www.nycveteransalliance.org/covid_19

Respondents

Summary: 208 individuals responded to the survey. We invited veterans who are not currently in the military; military members who are active, guard, or reserve; spouses or partners of veterans or military members; widows or widowers of veterans or military members; caregiving family members of veterans; and Gold Star Families to respond. We did not receive responses from caregivers or Gold Star Family members.

Survey Highlights:

- 96% of survey respondents were veterans and military members
- 4% of survey respondents were spouses, partners, and widow/widower
- 52% of survey respondents were 49 years of age or younger
- 73% of survey respondents live in the 5 boroughs
- 79% of survey respondents are enrolled (or their veteran is enrolled) in VA healthcare

Affiliation	19 yrs or younger	20-29 yrs	30-49 yrs	50-69 yrs	70-79 yrs	80 or older	Total
Veteran		10	79	59	32	3	183
Military Member	2	6	7	1			16
Spouse / Partner			5	1	2		8
Widow / Widower						1	1

Gender	19 yrs or younger	20-29 yrs	30-49 yrs	50-69 yrs	70-79 yrs	80 or older	Total
Male	1	12	65	49	33	3	163
Female	1	4	24	12	1	1	43
Non-Conforming			2				2

Residence	Enrolled in VA	Not Enrolled in VA	Unsure re: VA Enrollment	Total
Manhattan	29	10	1	40
Queens	28	9	1	38
Brooklyn	33	3	1	37
Bronx	19	6		25
Staten Island	7	2	2	11
Nassau / Suffolk	14	4		18
Westchester	8	1		9
Hudson Valley	4			4
Central New York	1			1
Connecticut	4	1		5
New Jersey	14			14
Outside Tri-State	4	2		6

Toxic Exposures and COVID-19

Summary: A majority of survey respondents indicate they have experienced toxic exposures during their military service, and a majority of individuals with toxic exposures expressed concerns that toxic exposures make them more vulnerable to the COVID-19 virus.

“I was at the WTC for its Joint Provisional Taskforce. If this virus hits me, I'm gonners.”

– Survey Respondent

Survey Highlights:

- 68% of respondents (142 total) indicated they (or their veteran spouse) had a history of at least one type of significant toxic exposure connected to their military service.
- Of these respondents, 62% (88 total) stated they were concerned the toxic exposure gave them increased vulnerability to COVID-19.
- 42% of respondents indicated being exposed to 2 or more types of toxic exposures.
- More than 70% of respondents reporting exposure to 9/11 contaminants, Agent Orange, PFAS, and Asbestos express concern about increased vulnerability to COVID-19.

Toxic Exposure	Concerned about increased vulnerability	NOT concerned about increased vulnerability	Total
Burn Pits	45 (68%)	21 (32%)	66 (100%)
9/11 Debris/Contaminants	26 (76%)	8 (24%)	34 (100%)
Agent Orange	21 (72%)	8 (28%)	29 (100%)
Contaminated Water	13 (52%)	12 (48%)	25 (100%)
Radioactive Materials	13 (65%)	7 (35%)	20 (100%)
PFAS	8 (73%)	3 (27%)	11 (100%)
Nerve Agents	5 (71%)	2 (29%)	7 (100%)
Asbestos	6 (86%)	1 (14%)	7 (100%)
Burning Oil Fields	2 (67%)	1 (33%)	3 (100%)

# of Toxic Exposure Types	1	2	3	4+	Total
# of Respondents	82 (58%)	41 (29%)	9 (6%)	10 (7%)	142 (100%)

Background: Veterans young and old have experienced hazardous toxic exposures during their military service that are connected with respiratory illnesses and other serious health conditions:

- **Burn Pits** – Veterans who served in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other conflict zones after 2001 have been exposed to open pits of burning trash and toxic substances, commonly called “burn pits,” which have led to respiratory illnesses and cancers, and is believed to be the cause of pulmonary, neurological, and gastrointestinal conditions as well.

- **9/11 Debris and Contaminants** – Similar to burn pits, debris and contaminants inhaled by military and civilian responders to the 9/11 Ground Zero site have caused a broad span of respiratory and pulmonary diseases, in addition to dozens of identified cancers.
- **Agent Orange** – Vietnam veterans experienced specific exposures to Agent Orange, a herbicide sprayed over the jungles of Vietnam and handled on ships and aircraft, which has led to leukemia, respiratory cancers, prostate and other cancers, and a number of other diseases and conditions as well, including conditions passed to children.
- **Radioactive Exposures** – Radioactive exposures, including depleted uranium, have been part of weapons testing and combat operations for generations, causing a wide span of conditions.
- **Gulf War Syndrome** – Gulf War veterans received specific exposures to burning oil fields in Kuwait and substances now recognized as chemical weapons known as nerve agents, such as sarin gas, which has led to respiratory, neurological, and other conditions known commonly as “Gulf War Syndrome.”
- **Contaminated Water and PFAS** – Here in the U.S., veterans and their families have been exposed to contaminated drinking water since the 1970s, including that caused by seepage of highly toxic per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) firefighting foam.

Top Concerns About COVID-19

Summary: Survey respondents were asked to indicate their one topmost concern at the time of the survey about the COVID-19 emergency. Respondents could select one of 10 multiple choice responses or write in their own topmost concern.

“I’m worried about being able to buy food.”

– Survey Respondent

Survey Highlights:

- 41% of respondents said their top concern is that they or their spouse/partner will get sick.
- 20% of respondents said their top concern is that they have lost or will lose their financial security, job, housing, or business.
- 17% of respondents said their top concern is that the government or general public are not taking the pandemic seriously enough.

Top Concern	Age 49 or Younger	Age 50 or Older	Total
I’m going to get sick	23	28	51 (25%)
Losing my financial security, job, housing, or business	27	15	42 (20%)
Govt/public aren’t taking pandemic seriously enough	20	15	35 (17%)
My spouse/partner will get sick	18	16	34 (16%)
Govt/public are overreacting to pandemic	6	11	17 (8%)
I have symptoms right now	5	3	8 (4%)
Other concerns about local, national, or global impact of pandemic	3	5	8 (4%)
Food/supply availability or access	1	2	3 (1%)
Not concerned	1	2	3 (1%)
Personally spreading virus to vulnerable individuals	3		3 (1%)
Lack of available testing	1	1	2 (>1%)
Other personal risk factors	1	1	2 (>1%)

Community Needs

Summary: Survey respondents were asked to write in what kind of resources they think would best help the veterans community right now. We categorized responses, including those naming multiple resources, as displayed in the table below.

“Being a veteran seems more like a curse than an honor. It’s a sad proud community.”

– Survey Respondent

Survey Highlights:

- 22% of survey respondents expressed that cash assistance, housing assistance, and jobs assistance are needed right now to help veterans and their families.
- 18% of survey respondents expressed the veterans community’s need for clear, factual information on the impacts of COVID-19 and what resources are available.
- 17% of survey respondents expressed the need for veterans to access COVID-19 testing.
- 12% of survey respondents expressed the need for virtual community gatherings and check-ins with isolated and vulnerable veterans.

Resources Most Helpful for Veterans Community	# of Responses
Financial / Housing / Jobs Assistance	45 (22%)
Factual Information	38 (18%)
Testing	35 (17%)
Community Connectivity / Outreach	24 (12%)
Healthcare Access – General	19 (9%)
Healthcare Access – VA	17 (8%)
Food/Supply Assistance	17 (8%)
Don’t Know	12 (6%)
Healthcare Access – Mental Health	7 (3%)
PPE – Masks, Gloves, Protective Gear/Supplies	6 (3%)
Medication Delivery/Assistance	4 (2%)
Stay Home / Keep Calm	4 (2%)
Mobile Medical Services	2 (<1%)
Nothing Specific for Veterans	2 (<1%)
Contact Elected Officials	1 (<1%)
Mobilize Guard/Reserve	1 (<1%)
Prayer	1 (<1%)
Leadership	1 (<1%)

In Their Own Words – Veterans and their spouses shared their thoughts and concerns in open comment boxes. Some of these responses are below illustrating various categories:

Financial Assistance

- *They should be providing ALL Disabled Veterans with some form of cash payment to support the ongoing crisis. Yes, some do receive VA compensation but that is not enough*

to cover ALL expenses especially those who are either unemployed or recently lost their jobs due to the pandemic.

- *Direct cash to the vets and or rebate his/her 2020 Fed tax to help these US residents!*
- *Financial safety nets for small business owners or those who have or will lose employment.*

Factual Information

- *Making sure that they are informed about the COVID-19 and the seriousness of this virus.*
- *Concise, factual information about how to best attack this pandemic.*
- *Honest, accurate, timely information regarding symptoms and actions to be taken in case of symptoms.*
- *A specific website with contact numbers that can help with our specific problems. (Ex. VA comes across logistical issues and are unable to deliver our medicine)*

Testing

- *That I can be tested. Reassurance that I can be tested at low or no cost. Where is my nearest testing facility? If I get tested and I don't have it now, can I get tested again later if I might have it then? If I do have it and I recover, how long until I can see family? Will I get it again? If I am out of work, how can I find work or make money until things are back to normal?*

Community Connectivity / Outreach

- *More reach for the homeless and elderly/underserved. They will be the ones to suffer the most. More testing availability as the virus spreads even when the person is not symptomatic.*
- *Outreach to individual veterans in conjunction with NY State, NYC, the VA Medical System and VA overall.*
- *Give us a mission!*

Food / Supply Assistance

- *A pantry of supplies and goods for our most vulnerable veterans*

Healthcare / Mental Healthcare Access

- *Veterans enrolled in the VA healthcare system ought to be contacted to see if their needs are being met.*
- *Phone/text/email support for mental health & psychological needs. If there's a secure/encrypted way that vets and military family members can get immediate access to video-based counseling through an app, that would be helpful. Finally, there are NYC-based military service members who are currently deployed to other parts of the USA or to other countries. It would bring them peace of mind if they could know that their families are safe and secure in NYC*

Other Thoughts

- *Unfortunately, there's not a whole lot that can be done specifically for veterans. We as a country are shockingly unprepared for a lengthy pandemic lockdown, and we'll all be weathering this storm together.*
- *I don't know. Being a veteran seems more like a curse than an honor. It's a sad proud community.*

Individual Needs

Summary: Survey respondents were asked if they need any immediate help and to respond in an open text box. Many respondents left notes saying no, they're doing okay. Some individuals asked for specific help, which we have responded to if they provided a phone number or email address to reach them.

Survey Highlights:

- 17% of respondents expressed an immediate need for financial assistance, food, supplies, medication, mental health support, or immediate responses to their health concerns.
- Comments and follow-on conversations with respondents expressed a need for connection with others during a time of uncertainty.

“If I get it, I’ll just consider passing away from it. I have no family or acquaintances.”

– Survey Respondent

Immediate Individual Needs	# of Responses
Financial Assistance	14
Food / Supplies / Medication	10
Need a Job	7
Need COVID-19 Testing	7
Mental Health Support / Connection	5

In Their Own Words – Veterans and their spouses shared their thoughts and concerns in open comment boxes. Some of these responses are below:

- *On or about the 7th March I became host to symptoms consistent with COVID19.... I did not meet the criteria to be tested according to my PCM. I am a student veteran and can't focus. I'm consumed by my status and the need to do something to positively impact this crisis for those who might be more vulnerable. I am more concerned about those more vulnerable and opportunities to assist.*
- *My SNAP disbursement is ten days late for March. I'm worried about being able to buy food.*
- *I feel that my high blood medication needs to be adjusted, but I don't want to go the VA at this time.*
- *Being a veteran hasn't moved anyone towards advocating for me. If I get it, I'll consider just passing away from it. I have no family, no acquaintances. Government is dismissive to my concerns, but gnarled veteran griping America has blinders on, so that's the thing.*
- *I need help figuring out rights for severely disabled to building laundry rooms in rent-stabilized housing in Manhattan.*
- *I suffer from Depression and PTSD, so I'm somewhat paranoid. I have been dealing with breathing issues for some time now and don't want to get paranoid more than what I am. Maybe I can speak with someone that will put my mind at ease.*
- *At this very moment, no, but if the self-isolation and lack of job persists for more than a month or two, I will have to deplete my savings due to lack of income from my job.*

- *I receive 70% compensation from the Army. I am not working. Can't use my GI bill, schools are closed, my friend lets me stay in one of his rooms. But if I had a Army housing voucher, I would be able to find my Rent Apartment in the city.*
- *Not at the moment, but access to healthcare and financial struggle are in the horizon.*
- *At the moment no, but I am sure my brothers and sisters in arms are in need of assistance with matters regarding finances and health.*

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