



Highlights of [GAO-05-120](#), a report to Congressional Requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

A lack of servicemember health and deployment data hampered investigations into the nature and causes of illnesses reported by many servicemembers following the 1990-91 Persian Gulf War. Public Law 105-85, enacted in November 1997, required the Department of Defense (DOD) to establish a system to assess the medical condition of servicemembers before and after deployments. Following its September 2003 report examining Army and Air Force compliance with DOD's force health protection and surveillance policies for Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Joint Guardian (OJG), GAO was asked in November 2003 to also determine (1) the extent to which the services met DOD's policies for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and, where applicable, compare results with OEF/OJG; and (2) what steps DOD has taken to establish a quality assurance program to ensure that the military services comply with force health protection and surveillance policies.

## What GAO Recommends

Because GAO has already made recommendations aimed to improve force health protection and surveillance and because of the recent implementation of DOD's quality assurance program, GAO is not making any additional recommendations regarding the program at this time. DOD reviewed a draft of this report and concurred with its findings.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-120](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-120).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Clifton Spruill at (202) 512-4531 or [spruillc@gao.gov](mailto:spruillc@gao.gov).

## DEFENSE HEALTH CARE

# Force Health Protection and Surveillance Policy Compliance Was Mixed, but Appears Better for Recent Deployments

## What GAO Found

Overall compliance with DOD's force health protection and surveillance policies for servicemembers that deployed in support of OIF varied by service, installation, and policy requirement. Such policies require that servicemembers be assessed before and after deploying overseas and receive certain immunizations, and that health-related documentation be maintained in a centralized location. GAO reviewed 1,862 active duty and selected reserve component servicemembers' medical records from a universe of 4,316 at selected military service installations participating in OIF. Overall, Army and Air Force compliance for sampled servicemembers for OIF appears much better compared to OEF and OJG. For example:

- Lower percentages of Army and Air Force servicemembers were missing pre- and post-deployment health assessments for OIF.
- Higher percentages of Army and Air Force servicemembers received required pre-deployment immunizations for OIF.
- Lower percentages of deployment health-related documentation were missing in servicemembers' permanent medical records and at DOD's centralized database for OIF.

The Marine Corps installations examined generally had lower levels of compliance than the other services; however, GAO did not review medical records from the Marines or Navy for OEF and OJG. Noncompliance with the requirements for health assessments may result in deployment of servicemembers with existing health problems or concerns that are unaddressed. It may also delay appropriate medical follow-up for a health problem or concern that may have arisen during or after deployment.

In January 2004, DOD established an overall deployment quality assurance program for ensuring that the services comply with force health protection and surveillance policies, and implementation of the program is ongoing. DOD's quality assurance program requires (1) reporting from DOD's centralized database on each service's submission of required pre-deployment and post-deployment health assessments for deployed servicemembers, (2) reporting from each service regarding the results of the individual service's deployment quality assurance program, and (3) joint DOD and service representative reviews at selected military installations to validate the service's deployment health quality assurance reporting. DOD officials believe that their quality assurance program has improved the services' compliance with requirements. However, the services are at different stages of implementing their own quality assurance programs as mandated by DOD. At the installations visited, GAO analysts observed that the Army and Air Force had centralized quality assurance processes in place that extensively involved medical personnel examining whether DOD's force health protection and surveillance requirements were met for deploying/re-deploying servicemembers. In contrast, GAO analysts observed that the Marine Corps installations did not have well-defined quality assurance processes for ensuring that requirements were met for servicemembers.