

# More cancers linked to contaminated water at camp Lejeune

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A much anticipated government study finds that military personnel stationed at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina between 1975 and 1985 face at least a 20% higher risk for certain cancers than those stationed

elsewhere.

Why the increased risk?

For decades, the drinking water at the Marine Corps base was contaminated with industrial solvents, federal documents show. When the contamination was first detected in the [early 1980s](#), wells on the base were shut down, but not before soldiers and their families had drunk it, cooked with it and bathed in it for years.

The contamination has prompted a spate of lawsuits and several studies looking at the health effects of the exposure.

In the latest [research](#), folks stationed at Camp Lejeune were more likely to develop certain blood cancers and cancers of the lung, breast, throat, esophagus and thyroid than those stationed at Camp Pendleton in California, where the water had not been contaminated. Civilians who only worked at Camp Lejeune were at higher risk for a shorter list of cancers.

The study was conducted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR).

The ATSDR has already done numerous studies focused on health problems at Camp Lejeune. Among other things, those studies looked at male breast cancer rates and [birth defects](#) in children born to base personnel.

Those earlier studies pointed out certain health risks, but the new work "more fully establishes the scope" of the problem, Richard Clapp, a Boston University emeritus public health professor who has worked on past Camp Lejeune research, told the Associated Press.

Dr. Aaron Bernstein, head of the ATSDR and CDC's environmental health programs, called the new study "remarkable" for being bigger and more rigorous than past research, the AP reported.

The report is "quite impressive," but cannot count as final proof that the tainted [drinking water](#) caused the cancers, David Savitz, a Brown University disease researcher who is consulting for plaintiffs' attorneys in Camp Lejeune-related litigation, told the AP.

But he added that the new research will add weight to arguments made on behalf of people who got sick after living and working at the base during that time period.

In the new study, the ATSDR investigated cancer incidence in about 211,000 people who were stationed at or worked at Camp Lejeune between 1975 and 1985 and compared them to about 224,000 people at California's Camp Pendleton during the same time period.

Scientists found a similar number of cancers overall in each group, about 12,000. But the numbers—and the relative risks calculated from those numbers—were higher in the Camp Lejeune population for a number of specific types of cancer. That list included some that weren't clearly identified in earlier studies, most notably thyroid cancer, Clapp said.

The new findings may lead to inclusion of thyroid [cancer](#) in a list of diseases for which Camp Lejeune personnel and their families might one day be compensated, Clapp added.

**More information:** Visit the CDC for more on the history of [Camp Lejeune](#).

Frank J. Bove, Evaluation of cancer incidence among Marines and Navy personnel and civilian workers exposed to contaminated drinking water

at USMC Base Camp Lejeune: a cohort study, (2024). [DOI: 10.1101/2024.01.27.24301873](https://doi.org/10.1101/2024.01.27.24301873)

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