

Got 2 Minutes...Can We Talk About Aviator Cancers?

Going back over a decade, the F-15 and other AF fighter communities lost flyers to various cancers. Until 2019, we did not have data-informed clarity that Air Force aircrews experienced elevated cancer diagnoses. The only information we had were our collective lived experiences. Meanwhile, the military medical establishment admonished us that our perception of our cancers was statistically narrow and analytically anecdotal, hence grossly misinformed. *We respectfully disagreed.* However, we understood that without peer-reviewed, vetted data, we had no sense of the scope of what was occurring. Consequently, we reached out to USAF senior leaders. They registered our concern and directed the 711th Human Performance Wing conduct an AF-only, narrow scope cancer study. In May 2021, the AF published the findings of its first-ever aviator cancer study of over 34,000+ male & 200+ female aircrew who flew fighters 1970 to 2004 (yellow box below). The “+” is the percent greater than the diagnostic norm of the same cancers documented in the U.S. general population:

2021 AF Study	Pancreas	Melanoma	Prostate	NH Lymphoma	Brain & CNS	Thyroid
Men	+13%	+25%	+19%	+13%	+6%	---
Women	---	+51%	---	+450%	---	+4%

The AF May 2021 affirmed our perception of the presence and prevalence of aircrew cancer. In its 2023 Phase 1a study, DOD studied 156,000 USN, USAF, USMC & USA fixed wing flyers health records. In its 2024 Phase 1b study that looked at ANG & RSVs aircrews, DOD leveraged 138,505 flyer health records. Both DOD studies looked at aviators who served 1992 to 2017. Additionally, the DOD studies evaluated personnel in all DOD fixed wing fleets, seats, & ranks (ANG & RSVs included). The cancer diagnoses findings of the two DOD (pink box) studies are shown below:

DOD Studies	All Sites	Melanoma	Prostate	Testis	Brain & CNS	Thyroid	Female Breast
Phase 1A: MAR 2023	+24%	+87%	+16%	+10%	0%	+39%	+16%
Phase 1B: MAY 2024	+20%	+80%	+21%	+2%	+3%	+38%	+18%

Bottomline: military/Veteran flyers are diagnosed with rates of cancer significantly higher than the U.S. general population. Why are these cancers occurring? The cancer-causing factors are not yet (fully) known to science and medicine. In this larger inquiry, what should come next? We need a study that identifies the cause(s) of increased cancers in military/Veteran aircrews.

That study is the **Aviation Cancer Examination Study (ACES Act)**. Basically, it would have the VA fund a National Academy of Sciences, Engineering & Medicine (NASEM) study that identifies what is most likely causing aviator cancers in the various military aviation operating environments.

Who are we in this work? In summer 2024 over a dozen Veteran aviator non-profit organizations formed the **Military Aviator Coalition for Health (MACH Coalition)**. The Coalition is a collaborative dedicated to advance helpful legislation, advocate effectively to the VA, and provide a face of Aviator Cancers to the press. To learn more, email us at machcoalition@gmail.com

MILITARY AVIATOR COALITION FOR HEALTH (MACH)
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