VA Claims Exams

FACT SHEET

BACKGROUND

On May 28, 2020, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) resumed in-person disability compensation and pension (C&P) medical exams performed by VA contractors. As of December 31, 2020, the available C&P exam locations for scheduling grew to 42,516 U.S. zip codes. Facilities in some areas are performing in-person exams but do not allow removal of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). There are facilities in other areas that allow for PPE removal during in-person examinations, as determined by the examiners.

The Medical Disability Program Office (MDEO) administers the Medical Disability Exam (MDE) contract program. MDEO contracts allow vendors to provide examinations to Veterans and service members who are seeking disability benefits from VA. The goal of the program is to reduce claims processing time by increasing access to examinations.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Q: What is a VA claim exam, also known as a Compensation and Pension examination?

A: If you've filed a claim for disability compensation or pension benefits, VA may ask you to go to an examination as part of the claim process. For disability compensation, this exam helps VA determine if you have a disability related to your military service or if your condition should receive an increased rating due to it worsening. In the case of pension claims, the exam documents the level of your disability. This is known as a VA claim exam or a compensation & pension exam. The examiner will only perform a medical review to identify or confirm any disabilities shared in your claim application. They will record the findings and provide them to a VA claims processor to complete the claim process.

Q: Is everyone scheduled for a VA claim exam?

A: No. After you have applied for disability compensation and/or pension, you may receive a phone call or a letter from a VA contract medical exam provider requesting you participate in a C&P exam. If you have claimed benefits based upon several disabilities, you may be asked to report for one or more exams so each disability can be reviewed by an appropriate examiner. This is a routine request. You may be asked to go to a VA medical center or a VA partner to complete the claim exams. Not every application for a benefit will require an exam; it depends on what medical evidence has been included with the application.

Q: How is the VA claim exam or C&P exam scheduled?

A: A VA partner is responsible for contacting you about scheduling a claim exam. They may either mail you a letter with the date and time of your appointment(s) and/or call you to find a time that fits with your schedule. If you are receiving treatment at a VA medical center, make sure they have your current address, phone number and email information. The wrong information could cause your appointment letter to be delayed and not reach you in time. Update your information online or call **1-800-827-1000**.

Q: The date and/or time of my C&P exam doesn't work for me. Can I reschedule my exam?

A: If your scheduled exam date or time does not work with some other life event, immediately call the number provided and try to reschedule your appointment. Unless it is an emergency situation, please try to give more than 24 hours of notice when canceling your exam. Not responding to a phone or letter request for scheduling an exam or missing the exam could cause VA to delay its decision on your claim. Not showing up to your exam takes up an appointment time another Veteran could have used and also could cause your claim to be rated "as-is" based only on the information in your application. Most facilities try to meet your requests (if possible) if you have a good reason for rescheduling your time and you give enough notice.

Q: How early do I need to get there before the VA claim exam?

A: It is helpful to be at least 15–30 minutes early to your scheduled exam time, leaving enough time to arrive at the facility location where your exam will take place. Once you check in with the exam staff, they will be able to answer questions on how long you will have to wait. Many examiners will not perform your exam if you are late, as they will not have enough time to complete the required history and exam review and take care of other Veterans on their schedule.

Please work closely with your contract exam provider as arrival times may need to change due to COVID-19.

Q: What will the claim exam be like?

A: Unlike a typical medical exam or other healthcare appointment you may have with VA, the claim exam will not give you any treatment or prescribe any medicine. The examiner's job is to review your medical records related to your disability claim, including the claim file, also known as your c-file/e-file. The c-file typically includes medical treatment records from Department of Defense (DoD), your DoD personnel records, treatment records from your health care providers, and any other documents submitted.

Q: How long will my claim exam take?

A: Each exam is different depending on the information and needs of each Veteran. Exams can range anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour or more. The examiner may ask you questions, observe you, perform a limited physical exam, or simply review your file with you. The time an examiner spends with you during your exam may appear brief, but remember, even if your visit is short, he or she is still carefully reviewing your claim. Examiners often spend an hour or more before or after your appointment reviewing your claim.

Q: Where does the claim exam fit within the claim process?

A: VA schedules the claim exam at the end of the "Information Gathering" stage, which is about 60% of the way through the claim decision process. After your exam, the examiner will complete a report that includes a review of the exam and any clinical test results. The examiner submits the report back to the VA regional office so it can be included within your c-file/e-file and they can continue processing your claim. VA will then perform a final review on your whole claim package and make a decision on your claim.

Q: Can the person doing my VA claim exam tell me the status of my claim?

A: No, the examiner is only involved in performing the exam and providing the results to the claims processor. They are not part of the rating process, and do not make the rating decisions. They will never know the outcome of your pending claim. Only a VA regional office can answer questions regarding rating decisions. To get a claim status update, please go to eBenefits.va.gov or, if you are working with an accredited Veterans Service Organization (VSO) representative, contact them for a status update. You may also contact VA at **1-800-827-1000**, and a contact representative will be pleased to answer your questions.

Q: Can I bring new treatment information or other evidence with me that I did not submit as part of my claim?

A: Yes, if you have any medical documents that were not previously sent to VA, you can bring them to your claim exam. However, the examiner may not be able to submit that information on your behalf. All new information can be uploaded through eBenefits.va.gov, submitted to your accredited VSO representative, or mailed to VA using the appropriate address found here – http://www.ebenefits.va.gov/compensation/mailingaddresses.asp. Ideally, you should submit all of your medical evidence with your claim application or before your claim exam so the examiner doing your exam has the most complete picture of your health status.

Q: Can I bring my spouse or family member to my claim exam?

A: For everyone's safety during COVID-19, we are asking that family members do not accompany Veterans to exams unless they are essential caregivers. Please check with your contract medical examiner before your visit.

Q: I missed my scheduled claim exam, what should I do?

A: If you were unable to attend the scheduled examination, you must contact the VA partner that scheduled your missed appointment. If you are unsure who the VA partner was that scheduled your appointment, please contact your nearest Regional Office or contact the VA Hotline at **1-800-827-1000** for assistance.

Q: My claim exam is scheduled far away from where I live; can I get help with paying for my travel?

A: Yes, if you are scheduled for a claim exam or C&P exam, you can request travel reimbursement. Mileage is calculated from your home to the exam facility. The contract C&P exam provider will process your mileage payment.

Q: Exams have resumed in my area; what do I need to do to schedule one?

A: Nothing at this time. VA's contract vendors will contact you to schedule an exam.

Q: When will in-person exams resume for transitioning Service members?

A: Service members in areas where in-person exams have resumed will be scheduled for their C&P exam.

Q: How are exams being rescheduled?

A: Exams are scheduled based on coordination between the Veteran and VA or vendors and are always at the convenience and discretion of the Veteran. When it is safe to conduct in-person exams, VA or contract medical exam providers will contact the Veteran to schedule a future appointment.

Q: What about my previously scheduled C&P exam?

A: VA, or our contract exam providers, will work with Veterans to reschedule in-person exams delayed by COVID-19 when it is safe to do so.

Q: Will my claim be denied if I need an exam but can't attend one during COVID-19?

A: No. In cases where an in-person exam is needed, no final action will be taken until an in-person exam can be safely completed.

Q: Some claims are being denied during COVID-19, why is this happening?

A: During COVID-19, VA is able to complete many claims through normal processes that may not require an in-person exam. These include, tele-C&P exams and reviews of acceptable clinical evidence (ACE).

Q: What else can I do to provide evidence in support of my claim?

A: You can still submit private treatment records or request that VA obtain those records on your behalf in support of your claim. Work with a VA accredited Veterans Service Organization representative, or an accredited attorney or claims agent for assistance in completing claims for VA benefits. You can always get more information and assistance online at https://iris.custhelp.va.gov/.