

## **Gulf war vaccine still a problem, leading scientist tells inquiry**

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AN MoD survey of 20,000 troops who served in Iraq last year has shown continuing problems with the anthrax vaccinations they were given, the scientist leading the study said yesterday.

Prof Simon Wessely said a series of studies by his team at King's College, London, pointed to the vaccinations given to those who served in the 1991 Gulf War as a major factor in the illnesses they subsequently suffered. "The more vaccines you received, the more likely you were to suffer ill-health," he told the public inquiry in Gulf war illnesses.

"Those who had the most vaccinations were nearly twice as likely to get ill. We still haven't got that right. We're still getting problems with anthrax vaccinations now."

The MoD admitted in October that tests shortly before the 1991 Gulf war in which mice were given the same combination of vaccinations given to troops produced serious side-effects. The troops were given whooping cough vaccine to speed up the effects of the anthrax vaccine. When the two were given to the mice "there was evidence of severe loss of condition and weight".

The MoD said whooping cough vaccine was "not recommended for use in adults and it was not licensed for use as an adjuvant [accelerant] to the anthrax vaccine". " Prof Wessely said troops given the combination of whooping cough vaccine and anthrax vaccines were 40 per cent more likely to suffer the symptoms attributed to the so-called Gulf War Syndrome.

He said the term Gulf War Syndrome was incorrect since there was no unique syndrome attributable to the Gulf War. "But that is all a bit of a red herring," he said. "What matters is that there is a clear Gulf War effect."

That has been attributed to a variety of causes including radioactive dust from depleted uranium munitions, Iraqi chemical weapons, organophosphate pesticides used to spray tents, and pollution from oil well fires. But the studies carried out by Prof Wessely's team showed that none of these was to blame.

The causes of the various illnesses suffered by Gulf war veterans were "a complicated mixture" of the effect of the vaccinations, stress of the threat of chemical or biological weapons, and "societal ' pressure".

Prof Wessely, asked by Lord Lloyd of Berwick what he meant by "societal pressure", pointed to the way in which troops were discharged as part of defence cuts almost as soon as they returned home and the MoD's initial reluctance to accept that there was a problem with their health.

"There were clearly things said about Gulf War Syndrome that were ill-advised," he said.

Use of the anthrax vaccine during the 2003 Iraq conflict has been blamed for a cluster of pregnancy problems suffered by troops who served with 33 Field Hospital or their partners. Recent pregnancies involving members of the unit have ended in two miscarriages, three premature births, one stillbirth and a forced termination. In each case, at least one parent had received the anthrax vaccination.

The MoD, which has told those concerned they must not discuss the issue with the press, has dismissed any suggestion that the problems have anything to do with the anthrax vaccination. It said Prof Wessely was not concerned about the safety of the anthrax vaccination in use with British forces