



National Gulf War Resource Center gives this information out free for all veterans.



Pyridostigmine Bromide

Historical Perspective – Pyridostigmine Bromide (PB), a nerve agent “pre-treatment” drug, was a small white pill issued to U.S. and U.K. troops. According to the DOD, as many as 250,000 U.S. troops took PB pills. The DOD failed to follow the FDA waiver, and very few records document who took how many of these pills.

Approved only for use for a severe neurological disorder known as myasthenia gravis, PB has never been tested or approved for use on normal populations to protect against chemical warfare agents.

The few limited tests conducted prior to the war by the DOD omitted anyone who might be sensitive. Despite the restrictive screening, adverse effects were still noted. Some researchers believe pre-treatment with PB is only effective in relation to exposure to soman and they claim it may increase adverse effects of sarin. In 1994, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee issued a report on PB pills.

Status of Investigations and Epidemiological Research – The NGWRC is demanding answers from the FDA concerning their recent approval (see www.ngwrc.org) of PB as a pretreatment for exposure to the nerve agent Soman. [We may need to look into this – are we still demanding answers?] Here is why: Documents and scientific studies conducted over the last 15 years have clearly shown this drug is both experimental and harmful. The DOD and the VA have both concluded through research that PB could not be ruled out as a factor in Gulf War veteran illnesses.

Several problems persist for use of this substance:

1. Studies have shown that PB's effectiveness against Soman is questionable.
2. Dosing for effectiveness of PB is variable in each individual and would require individual evaluation of the genetics and the size of the person receiving the dose – not likely to happen in the DOD.
3. PB causes muscle damage with even one dose in animal studies cited by the FDA.
4. Researcher shows that PB, with simultaneous exposures to combinations of DEET, permethrin, sarin, or jet fuel, causes brain and testicular injury in experimental animals.

Thus, in allowing this use, the FDA, DOD, Congress, and the President are providing questionable protection against Soman and increasing the likelihood that troops will be more susceptible to Sarin. It is possible that those who made the decision think they have chosen the lesser of two evils with the troops' protection in mind. But policy decisions that ignore the risks of PB are irresponsible.

Government use of PB, when it is known to have harmed veterans of the last Gulf War, is putting soldiers in another type of “Harms Way,” which could have been prevented. The Pentagon should have at least given pre- and post-deployment exams and blood draws that may allow for analysis of PB effects on health.

<http://www.bio.net/hypermil/immuno/1999-October/014932.html> - New York Times article, 10/19/1999

We at the NGWRC work hard to keep this information up to date; but we do miss some things. If you see anything that is out of date, please let us know. www.ngwrc.org