



Philadelphia Department of Public Health
Division of Disease Control

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Health Advisory
Public Advised to Avoid Taking Potassium Iodide (KI)
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The 8.9 magnitude earthquake, ensuing tsunami and nuclear reactor damage occurring in Japan has caused concerns around the world about the risk of radiation exposure and use of potassium iodide (KI) to prevent thyroid cancer. At this time, there is no risk of exposure to radiation from Japan for people in the Philadelphia region. Therefore, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) Division of Disease Control (DDC) is advising against taking KI at this time. PDPH is issuing this health advisory for the healthcare community to provide information for patients about KI as a preventive measure after exposure to radiation.

Important points to know:

- There is no increased risk of radiation exposure in the greater Philadelphia area from the Japanese reactors at this time.
- PDPH will continue to monitor the situation and issue additional recommendations in accordance with state and federal agencies as indicated.
- Potassium Iodide is only effective in preventing thyroid cancer after internal contamination with radioactive iodine.
- Internal contamination occurs when a person inhales or ingests radioactive iodine, or has direct open wound or mucous membrane contamination with radioactive iodine particles.
- KI blocks the uptake of radioactive iodine by the thyroid gland enhancing its elimination from the body.
- KI may not be recommended for some people to prevent thyroid cancer even if internal contamination is suspected. These conditions include:
 - allergy to iodine or shellfish
 - certain skin disorders including dermatitis herpetiformis or urticaria vasculitis
 - existing thyroid problems
- The risk for thyroid cancer from internal contamination with radioactive iodine is greater for young children and infants, than it is for older adults.
- Adults older than 40 years of age may not be recommended to receive KI even if internal contamination has occurred.

For more information on potassium iodide (KI), visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at: <http://emergency.cdc.gov/radiation/ki.asp>.

During this time of heightened awareness of disasters, it is good practice to remind patients and colleagues to develop a family emergency preparedness plan. This includes developing a communications plan and an emergency supply kit for the home. For more information on personal preparedness recommendations, visit PDPH's website at: http://www.phila.gov/health/DiseaseControl/Bio_YouPrepare.html

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