

Information on Potassium Iodide (KI)

For More Information: State Resources

Oregon Health Authority,
Information on Radiation Protection
HOTLINE: 1-877-290-6767
EMAIL: RPS.OHA@state.or.us

Oregon Public Health Current Hazards:
[http://public.health.oregon.gov/Prepare
dness/CurrentHazards/Pages/index.aspx](http://public.health.oregon.gov/Prepare/dness/CurrentHazards/Pages/index.aspx)

Radiation Protection Service:
[http://public.health.oregon.gov/PHD/O
EPH/RPS](http://public.health.oregon.gov/PHD/OEPH/RPS)

Oregon Poison Center:
1-800-222-1222

Federal Resources

RadNet
www.epa.gov/narel/radnet/

Nuclear Regulatory Commission
<http://www.nrc.gov>

Radiation Emergency Assistance
Center/Training Site (REAC/TS):
1-865-576-3131
<http://www.orau.gov/reacts/>

Centers for Disease Control and
Prevention:
<http://emergency.cdc.gov/radiation/>

U.S. Department of Health and Human
Services Radiation Event Medical
Management:
<http://remm.nlm.gov>



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Overall Main Point: *There is no reason for Oregonians to be taking potassium iodide (also known as KI) at this time in response to events in Japan.*

People exposed to high levels of Iodine 131 (radioactive iodine), for instance, those who live a short distance from a large radiation release, may need to take potassium iodide to lessen the long-term risk of thyroid disease. *Based on the current situation in Japan, there is no need for people in Oregon to take this medication.* In addition, it is NOT expected that we will reach a point where it is needed.

Below are some common questions that you may have about protecting yourself from the harmful effects of radiation. Please note: Based on careful radiation monitoring, there is **no** reason for Oregonians to take any of these actions at this time.

Q: Are there any ways I can protect myself and my family if radiation levels in Oregon become high?

A: Non-medical ways of reducing your risk of illness in the event of a radiation emergency include staying indoors or evacuating if recommended by public health authorities. *None of these actions are necessary in Oregon at this time.*

Q: I've heard about a medicine called "KI." What is it?

A: KI, also called potassium iodide, is a medicine that contains a large amount of iodine. Iodine is a nutrient that is needed by the body for normal thyroid gland function. We all get iodine through the food we eat, and if we use iodized salt in cooking. If you do not have enough iodine, your thyroid gland may not function properly.

Q: Why would I need to take KI to protect myself from radiation?

A: In radiation releases such as the recent one in Japan, one of the chemicals of concern is Iodine 131 which is a *radioactive form of iodine*. Iodine 131 is different from the iodine in our diet or KI because it is *unstable* and will release radioactivity. If you ingest or breathe in radioactive iodine, it will still be used by your thyroid gland, as the thyroid cannot tell the difference between safe and radioactive iodine. Taking KI in the event of exposure to radioactive iodine will increase the amount of safe iodine in your body and decrease the risk of your thyroid using the radioactive iodine. However, KI doesn't protect against other kinds of radiation or protect other parts of the body.

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Q: Couldn't I just take table salt (since it is iodized) instead of KI?

A: No. Iodized table salt will not provide enough iodine to protect the thyroid. Eating too much table salt has its own health risks. Table salt should not be used as a substitute.

Q: What is the risk of radioactive iodine?

A: Radioactive iodine, if used by your thyroid gland, can lead to thyroid disease, including cancer.

Q: Are there risks to taking KI even if we do not have a radioactive iodine exposure?

A: Yes. Some people, particularly those with an allergy to iodine should not take this medicine. Also, those who have chronic kidney disease should be cautious about taking this medicine, since it could lead to dangerous rises in blood potassium levels. It should also be used with caution by pregnant women, only when a large radioactive iodine exposure is suspected and only when the benefits outweigh the risks. Finally, we should avoid using this medicine unnecessarily, so that we have it if we really need it.

Q: When should I use KI or these other methods to protect myself?

A: Use of KI is recommended only when its potential benefits are greater than the risks of using it. This would depend on the amount of radiation in the area. Radiation levels in Japan and here in Oregon are being monitored closely. It is not expected that we will reach a level of radiation that you would need to use KI or the other strategies mentioned.

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For more information about Oregon Public Health Radiation Protection Services:

<http://public.health.oregon.gov/PHD/OEPH/RPS/Pages/index.aspx>

This document can be furnished in alternate formats for individuals with disabilities. Available formats are large print, Braille, audio tape, electronic, oral presentation and computer disk (in ASCII format).

Call 971-673-1244