

Food Safety & Radiation: Q & A from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

What is FDA doing to assess the situation in Japan?

Based on current information, there is no risk to the U.S. food supply. FDA is closely monitoring the situation in Japan and is working with the Japanese government and other U.S. agencies to continue to ensure that imported food remains safe. FDA already has a very robust screening process for imports and has staff in place at the ports to monitor incoming products. We do not have concerns with the safety of imported food products that have already reached the U.S. and that are in distribution. As part of our investigation, we are collecting information on all FDA regulated food products exported to the U.S. from Japan, including where they are grown, harvested, or manufactured, so we can further evaluate whether, in the future, they may pose a risk to consumers in the U.S. As FDA assesses whether there is a potential health risk associated with FDA-regulated food products imported from Japan, we will develop a monitoring strategy that may include increased and targeted product sampling at the border.

What products come to the US from Japan?

Imports from Japan include human and animal foods, medical devices and radiation emitting products, cosmetics, animal and human drugs and biologics, and dietary supplements. Foods imported from Japan make up less than 4 percent of foods imported from all sources. (Food products from Canada and Mexico each make up about 29 percent of all imported foods.) Almost 60 percent of all products imported from Japan are foods. The most common food products imported include seafood, snack foods and processed fruits and vegetables.

Are there dairy products that come from Japan?

Foods imported from Japan constitute less than 4 percent of foods imported from all sources. Dairy products make up only one-tenth of one percent of all FDA-regulated products imported from Japan. Most dairy products in the US market are produced domestically. FDA is consulting with USDA's Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to ensure the continued safety of dairy products.

Are there food harvesting (fields, fisheries) or processing facilities in the area of the Fukushima nuclear reactor?

While FDA does not track fields or fishery areas in foreign countries, it's important to note that the damage caused by the earthquake and ensuing tsunami has reportedly halted production prior to the explosion at the reactor.

Is there any reason for concern about radiation from these products when they are imported into the US?

Right now, due to the damage to the infrastructure in Japan, FDA believes that export activity is severely limited. FDA is monitoring all import records for Japan to determine when importation will resume and will conduct surveillance to assure safety. FDA does not have any concerns for products that were already in transit when the explosion occurred at the reactor.

What are the current procedures for measuring radiation contamination in food? How will these change? How will FDA ensure consumers' safety?

FDA has procedures and laboratory techniques for measuring radionuclide levels in food, and can also utilize the Food Emergency Response Network (FERN) (<http://www.fernlab.org/>). FERN integrates the nation's food-testing laboratories at the local, state, and federal levels into a network that is able to respond to emergencies involving biological, chemical, or radiological contamination of food. FDA is working with Customs and Border Protection (CPB) to share resources and techniques for measuring contamination. FDA has the ability to measure contamination in products and issued guidance in 1998 regarding safe levels.

Will FDA issue an import bulletin? What sort of techniques will FDA use to measure radiation in food?

FDA will issue an import bulletin or an assignment to the field once an assessment is completed on products and appropriate testing that can be completed. Products travel by vessel, the typical transit time for products to reach the US is about 8 days. FDA and other domestic regulatory labs have validated analytical methods to detect radiological contamination in food.

Is FDA looking at products that might have traveled *through* Japan at the time of the explosion?

FDA will be examining both food products labeled as having originated in Japan or having passed through Japan in transit. The same is true for raw ingredients.

How will the radiation affect fish and seafood that have not yet been fished or harvested?

The great quantity of water in the Pacific Ocean rapidly and effectively dilutes radioactive material, so fish and seafood are likely to be unaffected. However, FDA is taking all steps to evaluate and measure any contamination in fish presented for import into the US.

What are the chances of radiation affecting growing areas in the US? What action will FDA take to ensure the safety of consumers of those products?

At this time, there is no public health threat in the US related to radiation exposure. FDA, together with other agencies, is carefully monitoring any possibility for distribution of radiation to the United States. At this time, theoretical models do not indicate that significant amounts of radiation will reach the US coast or affect US fishing waters. Please see www.epa.gov for more information about monitoring efforts.

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These questions were provided by the FDA and are available at their website: <http://www.fda.gov/>