

Potassium Iodide (KI)

Pennsylvania's four nuclear power plant sites are closely regulated, secure and well maintained. In the unlikely event of a radiological release, the commonwealth is prepared to respond quickly and effectively. In an ongoing effort to help Pennsylvanians get ready for emergencies, the Department of Health is again offering potassium iodide tablets free of charge to individuals who live, work or attend school within a 10-mile radius of one of the state's four nuclear power plants.

Evacuation will always be the best way to protect ourselves and our families during a large-scale radiological release. **Taking KI is another layer of protection and not a substitute for evacuation.** In Pennsylvania, the decision to evacuate is based on what will best protect those that are most sensitive to the ill effects of radioactive iodine – children. You can get KI during normal business hours at Department of Health designated sites and/or county health department offices. To find an office in your area, visit www.health.pa.gov or call 1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258).

What is Potassium Iodide?

Potassium iodide (KI) is a salt compound. The element iodine is added to table salt to make it "iodized." KI is available over-the-counter in tablet form without a prescription.

What will KI do?

Taking KI will help to protect the thyroid gland, located in the front of your neck, against the harmful effects of radioactive iodine that may be released in a radiological emergency. The thyroid gland is the only part of the body that is protected by KI.

KI will ONLY protect the thyroid gland. The thyroid is the part of the body that quickly absorbs potentially harmful radioactive iodine. KI **will not** protect against all radioactive materials and is only effective against radioactive iodine when taken at the time of, or immediately following, a radiological release. Evacuation is the best way to protect yourself and your family if there is a release of radioactive iodine in your area.

How will I know when to take KI?

State health officials and the governor will make an announcement telling citizens when to take KI. When there is a serious incident at a nuclear power plant, the warning sirens will be sounded for approximately three to five minutes, followed by an Emergency Alert System message on your TV or radio.

Listening to these messages is critical because they will tell you what is going on at the plant, what you need to do and if you should take KI.

Do not take KI unless Pennsylvania state health officials and the governor instruct you to do so. Not all radiological releases involve radioactive iodine. When Pennsylvania state health officials and the governor tell you to take KI, follow the dosing instructions provided with your KI tablets.

Taking more tablets than recommended in a 24-hour period will not help increase KI's effectiveness and may increase the risk of side effects.

You should not take KI during a test of the Emergency Alert System or during a test of the sirens located within the 10-mile radius of the nuclear power plant sites.

Who can take KI?

Anyone who is not allergic to iodine can take KI. It is safe for pregnant women, women who are breastfeeding, people on thyroid medicine, and children and infants, unless they are allergic. If you are unsure if you should take KI, talk with your health care provider.

What are the side effects of KI?

Side effects are unlikely because of the low dose and the short time you will be taking the KI. Possible side effects include: skin rashes, metallic taste in mouth, sore teeth or gums, upset stomach, swelling of the salivary glands, burning feeling in mouth or throat, symptoms of a head cold and diarrhea.

What should I do if I have side effects?

Even though side effects are unlikely, if you have them and they are severe or if you have an allergic reaction, stop taking KI and call your health care provider or **1-877-PA-HEALTH** for instructions.

Is KI safe?

KI is safe. However, adverse reactions are possible in persons with existing thyroid conditions or those with an allergy to iodine. Anyone considering the use of KI for themselves or their family should follow the directions for storage and use included with the product. If you have more questions about KI, call your health care provider or your local health department at **1-877-PA-HEALTH**.

Will my children be able to get KI if they are at school?

The Department of Health has developed a distribution plan for schools that want KI. This plan includes information on how schools may include the administration of KI into their existing evacuation plans. It is up to each school district to decide if they want KI. However, KI may not be given without parental consent.

Can I get KI if I do not live, but work in the 10-mile radius?

Yes. Workplaces or businesses within the 10-mile radius will be able to get two tablets (one adult dose) for each employee. Interested businesses should contact the Department of Health to arrange pickup.

How do I store the tablets?

The tablets may be stored in a dry place with a controlled room temperature between 68° and 77° F. Make sure the storage place is easy to get to and remember.

How should I dispose of my expired KI?

You may throw your expired KI tablets in the regular trash. The tablets should not be flushed down the toilet or a sink drain. For additional information on proper disposal, visit www.fda.gov.

If I can't evacuate because of a preexisting condition, how will responders find me?

Your county emergency management agency maintains a registry of people who, for medical reasons, would not be able to evacuate. If you have a family member that you are concerned about, contact the county office to make sure it has his or her address information.

Where can I find my evacuation plan?

An evacuation plan for residents living within a 10-mile radius of a Pennsylvania nuclear power plant site is listed in your phone book or mailed to you by your nuclear utility. Make sure you read these pages carefully so that you know where to go in case of an emergency. If you have questions about your evacuation plan, please contact your county emergency management agency whose phone number is listed in the phone book.

Are Pennsylvania's nuclear power plants safe?

Yes, Pennsylvania's nuclear power plants are safe. The federal government, along with Pennsylvania state officials, perform regular oversight of the plants. In addition, local officials continually train with the plants on how to respond in case of an emergency to protect public health and safety.

Where can I find more information?

For more information about KI, visit the Department of Health's website at www.health.pa.gov, or call **1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258)**.