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FAQs about Radiation

According to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), Japan's nuclear emergency presents no danger to California. CDPH is working closely with our state and federal partners, including NRC, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Department of Energy, FEMA Region IX, and the California Emergency Management Agency (CalEMA).

California has a plan of response for radiological emergencies if one were to arise. Plans include the Nuclear Radiological Emergency Program and the National Response Framework.

Frequently Asked Questions

Updated: March 24, 1:45 p.m.

Q. Has there been increased radiation in California from the nuclear emergency in Japan?

A: Tests from eight environmental monitoring stations in California have found trace levels of radiation that do not present a risk to human health.

Q. How much radiation was found?

A: The amount of radiation identified in the tests was ten thousand times below amounts that would pose human health concerns.

Q. Is our drinking water safe?

A: California's drinking water is not affected by the nuclear emergency in Japan. Tests have found no levels of radiation in the environment that pose public health concerns.

Q. Is our food safe to eat?

A: Food grown in California and the United States has not been affected from Japan's nuclear emergency and we do not anticipate an impact since the levels of radiation detected in air are extremely low. Food from Japan makes up less than four percent of food imports. Incoming cargo shipments are routinely monitored for radiation by [U. S Customs and Border Protection](#). See the [U.S. Food and Drug Administration website](#) for more information.

Q. Do travelers from Japan present a danger to Californians?

A: Passengers from Japan are being screened for radiation upon arrival in the U.S. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that it is not aware of any travelers returning from Japan who have been contaminated with material at a level of concern.

Previously posted FAQ

Q. Is a plume of radiation coming to California?

A. At present, all data from state and federal sources show that harmful radiation won't reach California. CDPH is monitoring the situation, working closely with our federal, state and local partners.

Q. How much radiation will reach California?

A. No harmful radiation. Distance, time, and weather is in our favor. Japan is 5,000 miles from California. Radiation levels lessen with distance and we don't expect much above the amounts we see every day. Precipitation removes radiation from the atmosphere.

Q. What's everyday level of radiation we receive?

A. The typical North American exposure from natural background radiation is 2.0 millirem per day. A chest x-ray would expose an individual to 10 millirems. Radiation from Japan is expected to be thousands of times less than daily background radiation from natural and man-made sources—like the sun, air, soil, medical imaging, and life-saving therapies.

Q. What's a millirem?

A. A millirem is a dose of ionizing radiation. The average American is exposed to approximately 620 millirems of radiation each year from natural and medical sources.

Q. Is there a danger of radiation from the Japanese nuclear incident making it to the United States?

A. Given the thousands of miles between the two countries, Hawaii, Alaska, the U.S. Territories and the U.S., the West Coast is not expected to experience any harmful levels of radioactivity. In response to nuclear emergencies, CDPH works with state and federal agencies to monitor radioactive releases and predict their paths.

Q. What is the state and federal government doing to monitor radiation?

A. CDPH Radiologic Health Branch maintains eight air monitoring stations throughout California. They are located in Eureka (2 units), Richmond, Livermore, Avila Beach, San Luis Obispo, Los Angeles and San Diego. CDPH has increased surveillance from once a week to every 48 hours. The United States Environmental Protection Agency operates a network of air monitors in California and has recently

enhanced its capability in response to the Japan nuclear crisis ([U.S. EPA has real time monitoring capability](#)).

Q. Does California have a plan in place to respond to a radiological emergency?

A. CDPH has a plan for response to radiological emergencies, called the [Nuclear Emergency Response Plan](#). This plan is exercised regularly with local and federal partners in the communities around our nuclear power plants.

Q. Does California stockpile supplies for such an emergency?

A. California does stockpile emergency supplies, including potassium iodide (KI) tablets. Potassium iodide tablets are not recommended at this time, and can cause significant side effects in people with allergies to iodine, shellfish or who have thyroid problems. Potassium iodide tablets should not be taken unless directed by authorities.

Q. Why are potassium iodide tablets used during emergencies involving radiation exposure?

A. Potassium iodide (KI) tablets may be recommended to individuals who are at risk for radiation exposure or have been exposed to excessive radiation to block the body's absorption of radioactive iodine. Using KI when inappropriate could have rare but serious side effects such as abnormal heart rhythms, nausea, vomiting, electrolyte abnormalities and bleeding.

Q. Should I be taking potassium iodide to protect myself?

A. No. Potassium iodide (KI) tablets are not recommended at this time, and can present a danger to people with allergies to iodine, shellfish or who have thyroid problems.

Q. Should I purchase potassium iodide as a precaution?

A. No. KI is only appropriate within close proximity to a nuclear event. Using KI when inappropriate could have potential serious side effects such as abnormal heart rhythms, nausea, vomiting, electrolyte abnormalities and bleeding.

Q. Are there any protective measures I should currently take?

A. The best thing anyone can do is to stay informed. CDPH and other state and federal partners are monitoring the situation. If circumstances change, officials will alert the public to appropriate precautionary procedures. But, again, at this time, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission reports Japan's nuclear emergency presents no danger to California.

While California is not at risk of significant radiation from Japan, we are at risk of major earthquakes. People who live in earthquake prone regions should stock

emergency supplies of food, water, and other emergency supplies to be self sufficient for at least 3-5 days.

For additional information:

CDPH Information Line: (916) 341-3947 Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. Pacific Daylight Time

CDPH Media Inquiries: (916) 440-7259, CDPHPress@cdph.ca.gov

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636), Seven days a week, 24 hours a day

cdcinfo@cdc.gov

California Resources and Information

- [Governor Brown and CDPH Interim Director Statement on Radiation Safety](#)
Issued March 18, 2011
- [Statement from CDPH and Emergency Management Agency on Risk of Radiation Exposure](#)
Issued March 15, 2011

CDPH Media Briefing March 17, 2011

- [Audio of Media Briefing \(MPEG, 8.1 MB\)](#)
Includes media questions and answers
- [Opening Statements](#)

Federal Resources and Information

- [Japan 2011 Earthquake/Tsunami - U.S. Government Information](#)
- [CDC Information on Potassium Iodide \(KI\)](#)
- [CDC Radiation Emergencies](#)
Information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- [NRC news releases](#)
Information from the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
- [Remarks by the President on the Situation in Japan](#)
Made March 17, 2011

Other Resources and Information

- [Resources to Help Cope with a Traumatic Event](#)
- [Tips for Talking to Children in Trauma: Interventions at Home for Preschoolers to Adolescents](#)

Información sobre la radiación

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