



Wisconsin Department of Health Services
and
Wisconsin Emergency Management



POTASSIUM IODIDE (KI) QUESTION AND ANSWER SHEET

What is potassium iodide?

Potassium iodide, commonly known as KI, is a drug that can protect the thyroid from exposure to radioactive iodine. If taken prior to or within four hours of exposure to radioactive iodine, KI saturates the thyroid with stable iodine and reduces the thyroid's ability to absorb radioactive iodine.

How could I be exposed to radioactive iodine?

During a serious accident at a nuclear power plant, there may be a release of gaseous and solid radioactive material to the environment that includes radioactive iodine, which can be inhaled, ingested or absorbed into the body.

What is the health risk from exposure to radioactive iodine?

The primary risk from exposure to radioactive iodine is thyroid cancer.

Will KI protect me against all radiation exposure?

No. KI is not a 'magic pill'. Potassium iodide provides limited protection from only one radioactive substance (radioactive iodine) and for only one organ (the thyroid). *The only action that assures maximum protection from unnecessary radiation exposure is prompt evacuation.* In the event of an accidental release of radioactive material to the environment, evacuation instructions would be provided by state and local emergency government.

Is KI safe?

Some people are sensitive to KI and may suffer from a skin rash, swelling of the salivary glands, burning of mouth and throat, sore teeth and gums, stomach upset and diarrhea. These effects are not serious medical problems. *KI can also cause a severe allergic reaction in some individuals that are especially sensitive to iodine.* The frequency of a severe allergic reaction is reported to be less than 1 in 100,000 persons. The allergic reaction includes fever, joint pains, swelling of the face and body, and shortness of breath. The allergic individual could quickly become sick and require urgent medical care. *People who are allergic to shellfish and other foods containing iodine should not use KI without a physician's approval.*

What is Wisconsin's policy on KI?

The State of Wisconsin does not provide for the state-wide stockpiling and distribution KI to the general population (GP), but does support the limited pre-distribution of KI to the GP within any local jurisdiction which specifically requests that KI be available to its GP. Wisconsin state and local governments have agreed to use

precautionary evacuation as the primary method of avoiding unnecessary radiation exposure to the general public from a nuclear plant accident. *Prompt evacuation is the most effective method of protecting your family during a radiological emergency.*

How could I obtain KI if interested?

KI is an inexpensive, non-prescription drug that can be obtained through local pharmacies and/or companies advertising on the internet. *Consult your physician before obtaining KI if you have a shellfish/ iodine sensitivity.*

How much KI should I take if exposed to radioactive iodine?

KI should only be taken when directed to do so by a health authority. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has issued guidance on the use of KI to reduce the risk of thyroid cancer in children and adults in emergencies that involve the release of radioactive iodine to the environment. FDA recommends a daily KI dose of:

- 16 mg for infants less than 1 month old
- 32 mg for children aged 1 month to 3 years
- 65 mg for children/teenagers from 3 yrs to 18 yrs old
- 130 mg for adults, including pregnant and lactating women, and adolescents over 150 lbs.

KI is available in 65mg or 130 mg pills. Pills can be cut or crushed to provide recommended doses for children and infants. KI should not be given to pets or animals.

How long should I take KI if needed?

The FDA recommends that daily doses of KI should continue until the risk of radioactive iodine exposure has passed. This would likely occur after any necessary evacuations and food and milk supply controls are implemented.

Where can I get more information?

For KI health related information:

Wisconsin Department of Health Services
Radiation Protection Section
Monday – Friday 7:45 am – 4:30 pm
(608) 267-4797

www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/dph_beh/RadiatioP/PublicRad.htm

For KI Pre-Distribution Plan information:

Wisconsin Emergency Management
Radiological Emergency Preparedness
Monday – Friday 7:45 am – 4:30 pm
(608) 242-3232

<http://emergencymanagement.wi.gov/>

(to the right click on Radiological Emergency Preparedness)