



Radiation Risk from Japan: Should You Be Concerned?

The growing concern about the release of radiation from the damaged nuclear complex in Japan has raised fears of radiation exposure to people in North America. To help Americans understand their radiation-related health risks, the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists (AACE), the American Thyroid Association (ATA), The Endocrine Society, and the Society of Nuclear Medicine (SNM) issued a [joint statement](#).

The statement suggests that a major source of concern, in regard to radiation's impact on health, is radioactive iodine, including iodine-131. This type of iodine presents a special risk to health because the thyroid gland's exposure to high levels may lead to thyroid nodules and thyroid cancer years later. Children are particularly susceptible to the effects of this radiation.

The thyroid takes up iodine from the bloodstream and uses it to make thyroid hormones. Radioactive iodine uptake by the thyroid can be blocked by taking potassium iodide (KI) pills. However, you should not take KI unless there is a clear risk of exposure to high levels of radioactive iodine. While some radiation may be detected in the United States as a result of the nuclear reactor accident in Japan, experts are very confident that current radiation levels will not be harmful to the thyroid gland or general health. If radiation levels did warrant the use of KI, it should be taken as directed by physicians or public health authorities until the risk for significant exposure is gone.

The joint statement discourages people from purchasing or hoarding KI in the United States. Since there is not a radiation emergency in the United States or its territories, the statement does not support taking KI for preventive purposes at this time. KI can cause allergic reactions, skin rashes, salivary gland inflammation, hyperthyroidism, or hypothyroidism in some people.

AACE, ATA, The Endocrine Society, and SNM will continue to monitor potential risks to health from this accident and will issue further advisories as needed.

The Hormone Foundation, the public education affiliate of The Endocrine Society, serves as a resource for the public by promoting the prevention, treatment and cure of hormone-related conditions through outreach and education. For more information about the Foundation and to download free patient publications on thyroid cancer and related conditions, visit www.hormone.org.

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