

Subject: Facts About Radiation Pills

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Key facts about potassium iodide tablets:

--Purpose: Approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 1978 as an agent to block cancer-causing radiation from penetrating the thyroid gland. The dose must be taken before or within hours of radiation exposure to be fully effective.

--When: The American Thyroid Association has recommended that potassium iodide tablets be taken whenever the radiation exposure to the thyroid is at least 100 rad for adults and 50 rad for pregnant women and children. Test doses below those levels have shown no apparent health difficulties.

A rad is a unit that measures the effects of radiation on humans. In many cases, it is equal to a rem, another such measurement. A typical chest X-ray is 10 millirems (10 one-thousandths of a rem) and a mammogram, 10 to 30 millirems. But because those are external doses, as opposed to internal exposure to the thyroid, the two are not directly comparable.

--Availability: Not generally available. There is no federal

requirement for stockpiling pills for public use, although most utilities keep small supplies at nuclear power plants to protect emergency workers. Alabama, Tennessee and Arizona require a supply for the general public within five miles of a reactor.

--Cost: Typically, a person takes one 130 mg pill per day for 10 days. To stockpile, Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff estimates a cost of 10 cents per person per year, or about \$78,000 per year for the estimated 783,000 people living within five miles of 72 commercial nuclear power plant sites.

--Manufacture: Sold as a thyroid-blocking agent by Carter-Wallace Laboratories under commercial name Thyro-Block. Potassium iodide is produced by various manufacturers mostly for industrial uses, including photographic film, veterinary products, nylon and as an ingredient in cough medicine.

--History: Produced on emergency basis at the time of the Three Mile Island accident in 1979, but never distributed. Later, a presidential commission urged stockpiling of pills, but the NRC has left the decision to states.

Potassium iodide was used sporadically after the Chernobyl nuclear accident in Ukraine, but distribution was poor and childhood thyroid cancer rates have soared in regions affected by fallout. Distributed widely in Poland with no known side effects and no increase in thyroid cancer rates since Chernobyl. The World Health Organization in 1991 recommended supplies be stockpiled for use near nuclear power plants.

ANNOUNCEMENT: The e.News is changing, and there will be changes to many newsgroups. Please see the announcements in clari.net.announce or look at <URL: <http://www.clari.net/>> for more information. Changes will phase in beginning 11-15-95.