

Potassium Iodide (KI)

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 five nuclear power plants. The plants are closely regulated, secure and well maintained. In the unlikely event of a radiological release, the commonwealth is ready to respond quickly.

Evacuating (leaving) is always the best way to protect ourselves and our loved ones during a major radiological release. **KI tablets are only another layer of protection and should not take the place of evacuation.** In Pennsylvania, the decision to evacuate is based on what will best protect those that are most sensitive to the harmful effects of radioactive iodine – our children. You can get pills during normal business hours at state district offices and county health offices. To find the office in your area, visit www.health.state.pa.us or call **1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258)**.

What is Potassium Iodide?

Potassium iodide is a salt, similar to table salt. Its chemical symbol is KI. It is routinely added to table salt to make it "iodized." KI is available in tablet form, over-the-counter, without a prescription.

What will KI do?

Taking KI will help protect the thyroid gland, located in the front of your neck, against the harmful effects of radioactive iodine that may be released during a radiological emergency.

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 only works against radioactive iodine when taken at the time of, or right after, a radiological release. Evacuation is the best way to protect yourself and your loved ones 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 you when to take KI. When there is an ongoing accident at a nuclear plant, the warning sirens will sound for approximately three to five minutes. An Emergency Alert System message will also play on your TV or radio. Listening to these messages is critical because they will tell you what is going on, what you need to do and if you should take KI.

Do not take KI unless Pennsylvania state health officials and/or the governor tell 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 these instructions:

ADULTS should take **TWO** 65 mg pills

CHILDREN should take **ONE** 65 mg pill.

Taking more pills than recommended in a 24-hour period will not help KI work better and may increase your risk of side effects.

You should not take KI during a test of the Emergency Alert System or a test of the plant's sirens.

Who can take KI?

Anyone who is not allergic to iodine can take KI. It is safe for pregnant women and those who are breastfeeding, people on thyroid medicine, and children and infants, unless they are allergic to KI. If you are unsure if you should take KI, consult a 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 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 experience 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 potassium iodide and call a health care provider or **1-877-PA-HEALTH**.

Is KI safe?

Yes, KI is safe. However, 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 loved ones should follow the directions included with the tablets. If you have more questions about KI, call your health care provider or **1-877-PA-HEALTH**.

How do I give KI to my infant?

Crush **one** KI tablet and mix it with food or a drink so infants and small children will take the medicine in an emergency.

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 pills. The plan includes information on how schools may hand out KI during evacuations. It is up to each school district to decide if they want the pills. Pills may not be given to students 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 can get at least one dose of KI for each employee. Interested businesses should contact the Department of Health.

How do I store the pills?

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

How should I get rid of my expired pills?

Expired KI can be thrown away in the regular trash. Remove the pills from their box and mix them with things like used coffee grounds or kitty litter to make them less appealing to children or pets. Do not flush them down the toilet or wash them down a sink drain. For additional drug disposal information, visit www.fda.gov.

What happens if I can't find my KI?

KI will be available to residents on an ongoing basis through your local health department or state health center. Call **1-877-PA-HEALTH** or visit the department's website to find the location nearest to you.

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, will not be able to evacuate. If you have a loved one that you are concerned about, contact the county office to make sure they have his or her address information.

Where can I find my evacuation plan?

An evacuation plan for residents living in a 10-mile radius of Pennsylvania nuclear power plants is listed in your phone book, either in the front or in the blue pages, or mailed to you by your power plant. Make sure you read these pages carefully so 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 also is listed in the blue pages.

Are Pennsylvania's nuclear facilities safe?

Yes, Pennsylvania's five nuclear facility sites are safe. The federal government and Pennsylvania's state and local officials perform regular supervision of the plants. In addition, officials continually work with the plants to ensure plans are in place to protect public health and safety during an emergency.

Where can I find more information?

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