

School Potassium Iodide (KI) Distribution Plan FAQs



Potassium Iodide

Pennsylvania's five nuclear facility sites are closely regulated, secure and well maintained. In the unlikely event of a radiological release, the Commonwealth is prepared to respond, quickly and decisively. Former Gov. Mark Schweiker accepted the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission's offer of potassium iodide pills to further Pennsylvania's mission to ensure the safety and security of its citizens in a post-September 11 world.

Evacuation always will be the best way to protect our families and us during a large-scale radiological release. When accepting the KI pills, former Gov. Schweiker stressed that "this is only another layer of protection and not a substitute for evacuation." In Pennsylvania, the decision to evacuate is based on what is most protective for our most sensitive residents – our children. The pills will be distributed to people living and working in the 10-mile radius around the five nuclear facility sites. 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.

What is Potassium Iodide?

Potassium iodide (KI) is a salt compound. The element iodine 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 a tablet of KI will help to protect your thyroid gland, located in the front of your neck, against the harmful effects of radioactive iodine that may be released in a radiological emergency. The thyroid gland is the only part of the body that is protected by KI. However, KI is not a magic anti-radiation pill and 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. It is only effective against radioactive iodine when taken at the time of or immediately following a radiological release. Evacuation is the best way to protect yourself and your family 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 citizens when to take KI. When there is an ongoing accident at a nuclear facility, the warning sirens will be sounded for approximately three to five minutes followed by an Emergency Alert System message on your TV or radio. Listening to these messages is critical because they will tell you what is going on at the plant, what you need to do and if you should take KI.

Again, do not take KI unless Pennsylvania State Health Officials and the Governor instruct you to do so. Not all radiological releases involve radioactive iodine. When Pennsylvania State Health Officials and the Governor tell you to take KI, take only one 130 mg dose (1 pill) per 24

hours. Children should take half a pill. The pills are scored (a line down the middle) and can be broken in half. Taking two pills at once will not help increase KI's effectiveness, and may in fact increase the 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 iodide can take KI. It is safe for pregnant women, women who are breastfeeding, people on thyroid medicine, and children and infants, unless they are allergic. If you are unsure if you should take KI, consult your family physician.

What are the side effects of KI?

Side effects are unlikely because of the low dose and the short time you will be taking the drug. 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 your doctor or **1-877-PA-HEALTH** for instructions.

Is KI safe?

KI is safe. However, adverse 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 family should follow the directions for storage and use included with the product. If you have more questions about KI, call your doctor or your local health department at **1-877-PA-HEALTH**.

How do I give KI to my infant?

The half KI tablet should be crushed and then mixed with a food or 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 the pills. This plan includes information on how schools may incorporate the administration of KI into existing evacuation plans. It is up to each school district to decide if they want the pills. However, pills may not be administered 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 will be able to obtain at least one tablet for each employee. Interested businesses should contact the Department of Health to arrange pick up.

How do I store the pills?

The pills may be stored in a dry place with a controlled room temperature between 59° and 86° F. Make sure the storage place is easily accessible and memorable.

What happens if I can't find my KI?

KI will be available to residents on an ongoing basis through your local Health or State Health Center. Call **1-877-PA-HEALTH** or look on the Department's Website to find the one nearest you.

If I can't evacuate because of a preexisting condition, how will responders find me?

The County Emergency Management Agency maintains a registry of people who for medical reasons would not be able to evacuate. If you have a family member that you are concerned about, contact the County Office to make sure they have their address information.

Where can I find my evacuation plan?

An evacuation plan for the 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 that 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 of the local phonebook.

Are Pennsylvania's nuclear facilities safe?

Yes. Pennsylvania's five nuclear facility sites are safe. The federal government and Pennsylvania state and local officials perform regular oversight of the plants. In addition, officials continually train with the plants on how to respond in case of an emergency to protect public health and safety.

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**.