



Frequently Asked Question about Potassium Iodide (KI).

What is KI?

KI stands for potassium iodide. Potassium iodide is an ingredient found in table salt. KI can provide protection for the thyroid gland from radioactive iodine and can reduce the risk of thyroid cancer after a severe nuclear emergency resulting in a release of radiation.

What is the benefit of taking KI during a nuclear emergency?

During a nuclear emergency, people can either swallow or breathe in radioactive iodine that has been released into the air. Once inside the body, the radioactive iodine can cause a variety of health effects. The thyroid gland is very sensitive to radiation. KI can reduce the risk of thyroid cancer and other associated diseases, particularly in children and fetuses, if taken within several hours of exposure to radiation.

How soon after a nuclear emergency should KI be taken?

KI should be taken as soon as possible after public health officials tell you to do so. You should take one dose. Taking more will not help you because the thyroid can “hold” only small amounts of iodine.

Where can I get KI?

As part of New Jersey’s preparedness activities, the New Jersey Department of Health has made KI available to people who live or work within 10 miles of a nuclear power plant. KI has also been distributed to schools within 10 miles of a nuclear power plant.

KI can also be purchased over-the-counter at pharmacies without a doctor’s prescription.

Can everyone take KI?

Most people can take KI. However, people who are allergic to iodine should NOT take KI. You should talk to your health care provider **before** an emergency occurs to determine if any medical conditions prohibit you from taking KI.

Can pregnant or breastfeeding women take KI?

Yes, unless they are sensitive to iodine. For pregnant or breastfeeding women or babies under one month of age, KI should be taken as directed and a family doctor informed as soon as possible. KI can also be given safely to babies and children.

Is KI the best protection from radiation?

While KI can help to protect the thyroid gland, it cannot protect against other health effects caused by radiation. In the event of a nuclear emergency, it is best to avoid exposure to the radiation. Evacuation or sheltering in place are the best ways to avoid the problems caused by radiation. Be sure to follow any directions given by state/local health officials regarding any protective procedures.

Are there any common side effects caused by KI?

KI has few side effects. Children are not at higher risk of side effects. Side effects usually happen

when people take more doses than needed. Take the amount indicated on the table below and do not take it for longer than you are told. Possible minor side effects are skin rashes, swelling of the salivary glands, metallic taste, burning mouth, sore teeth/gums, stomach upset, diarrhea, or headaches. If you have severe side effects or a severe allergic reaction, call a doctor or go to the nearest hospital.

What form does KI come in?

KI is most commonly available in tablet form. and liquid form.

Liquid form is suggested when dispensing to children because they need to receive smaller doses than adults.

When and how much KI should I take?

KI should not be taken until public health officials tell you to do so. The following table provides the recommended doses:

Only one dose should be taken every 24 hours. Taking a higher dose or more often than recommended will not help and could increase the risk of side effects.

For more information, please visit the NJ Dept. of Health website at www.nj.gov/health.