



Health action in crises

FAQs: Japan nuclear concerns

5 April 2011

Water contamination

Can I drink the tap water in Japan?

- Drinking tap water in Japan poses no immediate health risk, but local conditions will differ and may fluctuate.
- The Japanese authorities are closely monitoring the situation and are issuing advice, when needed, against consumption of tap water, including specific recommendations for infants. Essential hydration of infants should not be compromised in an attempt to reduce exposure to radionuclide contamination.
- The standards adopted by the Japanese authorities for this emergency are precautionary. Currently, radioactive iodine is the most common detected contaminant; the standard for adults is 300 Becquerels per litre in drinking-water. In the very unlikely scenario that drinking-water was contaminated and consumed for an entire year at this level, the additional radiation exposure from this water would be equivalent to natural background radiation during one year.
- WHO urges people in the area to heed the advice of local authorities, as they will have access to the latest measurements of radiation levels in water to compare against the standards for adults and children.

Can radioactive contamination be removed from water?

- Standard water treatment procedures may remove significant amounts of radioactive contaminants. Other options to reduce concentrations of radiation contaminants include controlled dilution of contaminated water with non-contaminated water.
- Boiling water will not remove radioactive iodine.

Why do the guidance levels for radioactive Iodine-131 in drinking water vary?

The guidance levels found in different sets of recommendations vary because some apply to routine situations and others to emergency situations. The table below summarizes the guidance on radioactive Iodine-131 in drinking water and provides an indication of the equivalent exposure from routine activities.

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