



Health action in crises

FAQs: Japan nuclear concerns

5 April 2011

Public health actions

Which public health actions are most important to take?

- Health effects can only occur if someone is exposed to radiation, thus the main protective action someone can take is to prevent exposure. Those closest to the radiation are at greatest risk of exposure and the greater the distance away, the lower the risk. This is why, when a nuclear accident occurs, the recommended public health actions involve evacuation and sheltering of those near the site.
- These necessary actions depend on the estimated exposure (i.e., the amount of radioactivity released into the atmosphere and the prevailing meteorological conditions, such as wind and rain. Actions may include: evacuation of the area around or near the nuclear power plant; advising people to shelter in their homes, offices, other secure buildings or designated shelters to reduce exposure; and distributing and administering potassium iodide pills to reduce the risk of thyroid cancer).
- If warranted, public health or national authorities may restrict or prohibit the consumption of vegetables and dairy products produced in the vicinity of the nuclear power plant in order to reduce exposure.
- Only competent authorities who have conducted a careful analysis of the emergency situation are in a position to recommend which of these public health measures should be undertaken.

-
1. Current risk
 2. Ionizing radiation
 3. Human exposure to ionizing radiation
 4. [Travel advice](#)
 5. Health effects
 6. **Public health actions**
 7. [Personal protective measures](#)
 8. Food safety
 9. [Water contamination](#)
 10. [WHO's response](#)
-

Related links

[Japan earthquake and tsunami](#)

[Latest Situation report WHO Western Pacific Regional Office](#)

[Archive of Japan nuclear concerns frequently asked questions \(FAQs\)](#)