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Mar 17, 2011

High US demand for iodide pills despite reassurances



Shelves remain empty of Potassium Iodide in Los Angeles following a run on the supplement at grocery stores and pharmacies. -- PHOTO: AFP

LOS ANGELES - US AUTHORITIES sought on Wednesday to reassure Americans that there is minimal health risk here of radioactivity from Japan, as a US iodide pill maker reported an 'enormous' run on the drug.

Demand for potassium iodide, which can protect against the effects of radioactive iodine, was strongest on the US West Coast, where some fear a cloud spewing from Japan's Fukushima nuclear plant could be blown, drug company Anbex said.

The firm, which says it is the only US maker of the pills, was flooded with thousands of orders for its Iosat drug after last Friday's earthquake and tsunami, which has triggered an ongoing nuclear crisis.

'The spike is enormous ... we were out of stock by Friday night,' said Mr Alan Morris, president of Anbex, which supplies the drug to individuals and retailers, including online.

'The demand mostly is coming from the West Coast of the US, but there are a significant number of inquiries, requests, orders coming from Japan, Korea, all over the Far East,' he told AFP.

A random survey of Los Angeles pharmacies by an AFP photographer found no lines of people trying to buy the drug, although some retailers said they had received some requests, but did not have supplies. The surge in demand came as the head of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission warned of 'extremely high' radiation levels from the Fukushima plant. -- AFP

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