



Health action in crises

FAQs: Japan nuclear concerns

5 April 2011

Ionizing radiation

What is ionizing radiation?

- When certain atoms disintegrate, they release a type of energy called ionizing radiation. This energy can travel as either electromagnetic waves (i.e. gamma or X-rays) or as particles (i.e. alpha, beta or neutrons).
- The atoms that emit radiation are called radionuclides; e.g., radioactive iodine, caesium, and plutonium.
- Ionizing radiation is an essential tool for diagnosis and treatment in medicine, that must be used with rigorous attention to safety.

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