

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM RADIATION

As of April 3, 1979, as far as we know, there has been NO SUBSTANTIAL INCREASE IN RADIATION beyond 30 miles of the damaged nuclear reactor on 3-mile Island. However, scientists do not know what is happening in the reactor or how to control it. There is still some risk that further radioactivity could be emitted which would form a cloud and travel eastward. It would be driven by the wind and would emit radiation and fall-out on a narrow path. Since Philadelphia is 90 miles from the reactor, we have no way of knowing whether we would be in the path of such a cloud.

Some people are more likely to be damaged if they are exposed to radiation: the young, the old, the ill, the pregnant, and those who have already received substantial doses of radiation. If a cloud of radioactive material does form and come our way, it will be too late to evacuate at that time. If we do find ourselves in the path of such a cloud, we should know WHAT WE CAN DO THAT WILL PARTIALLY PROTECT US FROM THE EFFECTS OF RADIATION.

We might see a radioactive cloud, or it might be invisible as it approaches. Our radios will inform us whether radiation will come to Philadelphia and approximately what time we should expect it. Depending on wind speed, we could have anywhere from 2 to 8 hours to prepare for its arrival. The risks of being caught unprotected on the road would outweigh our small chance of getting away from the radioactivity at that time.

When you hear the cloud is coming:

1. Draw your bathtub full of water to use if the water supply is contaminated later. Devise some way to cover it.
2. Cover all food so radioactive particles do not settle on it.
3. Radioactive iodine will be one of the elements in the fall-out from the cloud. This substance will tend to concentrate in the thyroid, destroying this gland. To avoid this, eat as much iodine as you can before the cloud arrives, and for several days thereafter. This will saturate the thyroid so it cannot take in the radioactive iodine. Good sources are fish, kelp, iodized salt, and potassium iodide, the latter available only by perscription. People with hypertension or heart disease should not eat kelp or salt.
4. Go to your basement, because the more floors between you and the radioactive cloud, the more protection you will have from direct radiation. A car or bus is no protection, and might get stuck in a traffic jam.
5. If you leave your home, take with you a rain slicker, boots, rain hat, container of water, and a radio. These will not protect you from the direct radiation from the cloud, but will protect you from the fall-out just after the cloud has past, and give you the essentials for waiting out the passing of the cloud in another basement or shelter.

When the cloud is in your area:

1. Stay in the basement under the highest part of the building, preferably in a room with no windows.
2. Do not run fans or air conditioners. These bring in more radioactive particles from the outside.
3. Stay in the basement while the cloud is going over - maybe 2-3 hours. You will hear on your radio when the danger from the direct radiation of the passing cloud is over.

After the cloud has passed:

1. Put on your rain coat and hat and boots to protect yourself from radioactive particles which will be settling to the ground.
2. Just inside your door, carefully remove your coat, hat, and boots so that the outside of them does not touch you or anything in your house. Don't let children or pets come close to these clothes which you reserve to wear when you go out side.
3. Stay inside as long as possible - the danger from fall-out gradually reduces, and you will get radio information about this. Go outside only in cases of extreme emergency.
4. If you must be outside, imagine that there is a radioactive "dust" on everything, even though you cannot see it. If this "dust" gets on anything or anybody, wash them thoroughly. Shower immediately on returning home, and shampoo also.
5. Be sure that food you buy does not come from land that was exposed to radiation. Especially avoid milk and cheese produced in the radioactive areas. Wash all food, and peel your produce.

Long-term effects of radiation:

The amount of radioactivity you could be exposed to from such a cloud would NOT be enough to cause the vomiting and diarrhea of radiation illness. This does not mean there would be no damage to your health. Full body exposure to radiation such as is occurring to people living near the 3-mile Island plant damages many body cells - some of the damage is irreparable. The effect is to accelerate the natural aging process.

1. The immune system may be depressed. This can make you more susceptible to disease. This may be a permanent or a temporary effect. Avoid exposing yourself to infectious diseases. Ask your doctor for more precise information regarding your specific exposure.
2. Radiation speeds up the aging process, making you more susceptible to all degenerative diseases. These include heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, respiratory diseases, blood disorders.
3. Radiation damages the unborn child of a pregnant woman, and even the future children of men and women who have received radiation. These children may be susceptible to infections, and are more likely to have allergies, asthma, leukemia, and cancer.
4. While it may be difficult to prove which particular illnesses are related to a particular radiation exposure, we can expect damaging effects to the health of the total population immediately surrounding 3-mile Island because they were not evacuated during the time when the nuclear reactor was out of control. There will be a similar effect to those people on the eastern coast who may find themselves in the path of a radioactive cloud. The amount of damage to a group of people will be proportional to the amount of exposure they have to radiation.

This information has been provided by the Medical Task Group of the Keystone Alliance in consultation with Dr. Rosalie Bertell, Ph.D., G.N.S.H., a bio-statistician who has been called as a consultant on environmental hazards by several foreign governments and three times by the United States Congress. She is presently a consultant to medical associations of the states of New York and Wisconsin.

