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EPA boosts radiation monitoring after low levels found in milk

By the **CNN Wire Staff**

March 31, 2011 6:51 p.m. EDT



Radiation gets into the milk because it falls on grass eaten by cows.

Washington (CNN) -- There is no health risk from consuming milk with extremely low levels of radiation, like those found in Washington state and California, experts said Thursday, echoing the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

"When we have a disaster like we've had with a nuclear power plant in Japan, we're probably going to find things that are truly not a public health risk, but I think it's very difficult for the public to assimilate this information

and understand the risks," said Dr. Wally Curran, a radiation oncologist and head of Emory University's Winship Cancer Center.

The federal agency said Wednesday it was increasing its nationwide monitoring of radiation in milk, precipitation, drinking water, and other outlets. It already tracks radiation in those potential exposure routes through an existing network of stations across the country.

Results from screening samples of milk taken in the past week in Spokane, Washington, and in San Luis Obispo County, California, detected radioactive iodine, or iodine-131, at a level 5,000 times lower than the limit set by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, officials said.

At that level, a person would have to drink 1,000 liters of milk to receive the same amount of radiation as a chest X-ray, said Dr. James Cox, radiation oncologist at Houston's MD Anderson Cancer Center.

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

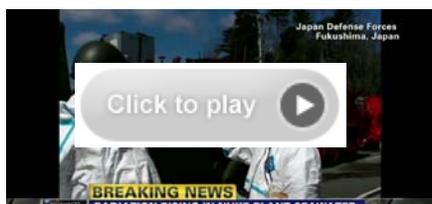
Isotope won't remain in humans' or animals' digestive systems, expert says

The Environmental Protection Agency is increasing monitoring nationwide

A milk sample from Washington state and California shows "minuscule amounts" of radiation

Tests confirm the milk is safe to drink, officials say

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The I-131 isotope has a very short half-life of about eight days, the EPA said, so the level detected in milk and milk products is expected to drop relatively quickly.

"The good news about iodine is, it has a short half-life," said Curran. "It doesn't dwell in any biologic system, be it an adult, a child, a cow, for any significant period of time, and at those levels there's no evidence that there's any medical significance."

Radiation gets into the milk because it falls on grass eaten by cows. The milk does not itself absorb radiation.

FDA senior scientist Patricia Hansen also said the findings are "minuscule" compared to what people experience

every day.

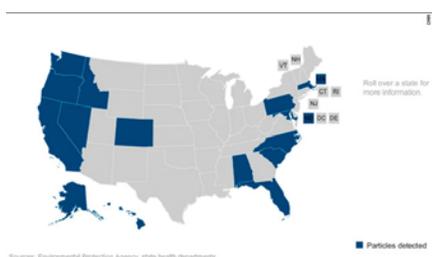
Washington Gov. Chris Gregoire said tests confirmed the milk is safe to drink.

"This morning I spoke with the chief advisers for both the EPA and the FDA and they confirmed that these levels are minuscule and are far below levels of public health concern, including for infants and children," Gregoire said in a statement.

"According to them, a pint of milk at these levels would expose an individual to less radiation than would a five-hour airplane flight."

Similarly, the California Department of Public Health reassured residents that the levels do not pose a threat.

"When radioactive material is spread through the atmosphere, it drops to the ground and gets in the environment. When cows consume grass, hay, feed, and water, radioactivity will be processed and become part of the milk we drink. However, the amounts are so small they pose no threat to public health," the department said.



Source: Environmental Protection Agency, state health departments
 Radioactive particles from Japan detected in U.S.

At least 15 states have reported radioisotopes from Japan's crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in air or water or both. No states have recommended that residents take potassium iodide, a salt that protects the thyroid gland from radioactive iodine.

Iodine-131 has been found in Eastern states from Florida to Massachusetts as well as in Western states like Oregon, Colorado, and California, according to sensors and officials in those states.

None of the levels poses a risk to public health, they said.

At high levels, the isotope focuses on and accumulates in a person's thyroid gland, Curran said. A medical test for thyroid health involves a person ingesting iodine-131 and undergoing a nuclear scan to examine the gland.

The Japanese plant has been leaking radiation since it was damaged in a tsunami that followed a massive earthquake March 11.

CNN's Sara Weisfeldt and Ashley Hayes contributed to this report.

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Guest

@Wzrd1 - you're right to point to all the other sources of background radiation - the human body is indeed exposed to radiation all the time, but my 1 year old does not fly on planes, sit on granite counter-tops play with coal, or lie out in the sun... she might eat the occasional banana but I think... [more](#)

11 minutes ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)



Guest

@Wzrd1 - yes the amount you consumed on day 1 will be 50% gone by day 8 - but what about the amount you consumed on day 2 through 8? I hope you get the picture.

24 minutes ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)



Wzrd1

Guest, I DO understand, BUT said isotopes were ALL CREATED during fission. As fission ended when the reactor SCRAM action occurred during the earthquake, the point is moot. It's ALL expiring rapidly. It's NOT being replaced by new fission. Honestly, we're talking about a few POUNDS, spread across the p... [more](#)

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Guest

So body scanner at airport - best to avoid (see <http://www.cnn.com/2011/HEALTH...> but toddlers drinking Iodine 131 every day, not a health concern. Easy to say "don't worry" because it will be impossible to understand the consequences as cancer can take years to develop.

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Aloisae

There is a considerable body of data concerning the dangers of Iodine-131 specifically in the milk supply and specifically as it pertains to children ingesting said milk. We've been, sadly, studying this with real world subjects since the 1950s including some very long term studies. We know the le... [more](#)

14 minutes ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)



Wzrd1

Iodine-131=8 days half-life.

Can you GUESS what that means?

It's half gone in 8 days. Half gone AGAIN in 8 days...

So, in 8 days, it'll be 1/10000 of the maximum allowable level.

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Guest

@nuce Dr. James Cox, radiation oncologist at Houston's MD Anderson Cancer Center states "a person would have to drink 1,000 liters of milk to receive the same amount of radiation as a chest X-ray" - so by your math a flight is like 4 chest x-rays? I don't think so. Funny how another article on CNN ... [more](#)

48 minutes ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)



Wzrd1

You are RIGHT, Guest!
BAN GRANITE COUTERTOPS!
They're radioactive, MORE than what is in our milk supply!
So is coal. BAN IT!
Oops, so is petroleum products! BAN THEM!
26 minutes ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)



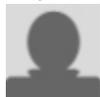
nuce

So here is the issue with cumulative dose. There has been no conclusive study on the subject. The best knowledge we have of health effects comes from the Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors. Scientists have shown that low doses may cause cancer. Scientists have also shown that low doses may also be... [more](#)
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Mcwhiteys

I bet if the EPA would have measure the radiation levels before the Japanese disaster the levels would have probably been the same. We have been getting poisoned for years. Cancer has skyrocketed over the last 20 years.
1 hour ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)



Wzrd1

ACTUALLY, most of THAT is due to chemicals. PREVIOUSLY, it was due to radioisotopes from nuclear warhead tests. It is ALL open source, hence googleable. Dolt.
THIS is like taking a quick leak on a volcano, nothing much accomplished.
But, DO denigrate on.
53 minutes ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)



bremen3011

O.....M.....G, this is so like the end of the world, a little bit of milk is tainted, everyone duck!Yea that's right people, keep sucking on that media milk that is fed to you every night.People say you shouldn't always trust what the government tells you, double for the media, no... [more](#)
1 hour ago | [Like \(1\)](#) | [Report abuse](#)



Wzrd1

Actually, *I HAVE* had "radioactive tainted" milk. Years ago, from TMI-2.
I LIVE in Pennsylvania.
I guess I'm dead now and posting from the grave, right?
24 minutes ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)



mimmoza
nighty-night

1 hour ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)



stickman500

Yep. We all will. *yawn*

Good night.

1 hour ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)



TACOMAGROOVE

I hope you die first ;)

1 hour ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)



mimmoza

Actually, I don't really care. I am just bored out of my mind and this discussion is as good as any other.

1 hour ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)



banishcubed

You must understand that the government weighs your child's health (cost) against corporate profits (benefits).

Only significant damage triggers limits. See the U.S. Supreme Court case on benzene -

<http://people.hofstra.edu/vern...>

1 hour ago | [Like \(1\)](#) | [Report abuse](#)



Wzrd1

Not QUITE, commie. The government weighs what can be EARNED vs cost to protect. EVIL EVIL EVIL! We should protect ALL, even terminal patients, to the fullest! The poor SOB SHOULD displace the previously productive worker in the hospital, leaving said worker either disabled or dead. So says the commie ma... [more](#)

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Guest

This is a HUGE deal: "According to [the FDA/EPA], a pint of milk at these levels would expose an individual to less radiation than would a five-hour airplane flight." Most infants drink more than a pint of milk EVERY day (1 pint = 16 oz). So my 1 year old is being exposed to the same radiation as if... [more](#)

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nuce

It is far less than a flight. Current readings show less than a Bq/l. With that rate, it would take roughly 4000 liters (around 900 gallons) of milk to equal a flight.

1 hour ago | [Like \(2\)](#) | [Report abuse](#)



banishcubed

So in the time it takes to reduce one days worth of radioactive iodine to 50% (eight days), there were 8 days of new radioactive iodine dumped on the land. That is a situation where things get worse, not better.

1 hour ago | [Like \(2\)](#) | [Report abuse](#)



Wzrd1

Yeah, because EVERYONE IN PENNSYLVANIA IS DEAD FROM RADIATION, right?Oops, either I am dead and posting from the grave OR I survived TMI-2. A place that I've stayed around for more than a few weeks AND I live near Philadelphia.A plant that had a 60% meltdown AND released iodine-131 and cesium-137.Yo... [more](#)

18 minutes ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)



TACOMAGROOVE

I wish your theory well. It should be published in the journal of science under: the failed biology of man.

35 minutes ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)



Wzrd1

Tacomagroove, you're an idiot. Pure, plain and simple.YOU listed ALL radionuclides. ALL. MOST of which are NEVER, EVER, EVER, EVER, EVER produced by a nuclear reactor.SO, what is your excuse, other than you are an idiot?There are about a DOZEN isotopes produced in a nuclear reactor, of THOSE, ... [more](#)

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