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## Ionizing radiation

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## Radiation accidents and emergencies



Although the likelihood of a major accident at a nuclear facility is low, should such an accident occur, protective actions near the facility and monitoring of radiation at longer distances would need to be taken to protect the public. Other radiation emergencies (for example, a radiation source appears in the human environment, patients undergoing radiotherapy treatment are accidentally overexposed) normally affect only a few individuals, but they occur much more frequently (several times each year). More recently the threat of possible terrorist attacks using radioactive materials or nuclear warheads has become prominent.

### UN AGENCY CONTACT AND RESPONSE

For major nuclear and radiation emergencies the international organizations with relevant responsibilities have a Joint Plan for a co-ordinated response. The [International Atomic Energy Agency \(IAEA\)](#) is the prime coordinating agency for an international response to radiation accidents. Functional links have been established between agencies to ensure continuous communication and activation of the plan of action.

### WHO'S ROLE

In addition to the IAEA and WHO, the key international partners cooperating in this response are: the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA) of the Organization on Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

WHO is a full party to the Conventions on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident (Early Notification Convention) and Assistance in the Case of a Nuclear Accident or Radiological Emergency (Assistance Convention), for which the IAEA is the focal point. These Conventions provide the prime legal instruments that establish an international framework to facilitate exchange of information and the prompt provision of assistance in the event of radiation accidents, with the aim of minimizing the health consequences.

WHO works closely with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to prepare for and respond to nuclear accidents and radiological emergencies, principally to provide, coordinate and consult medical assistance to victims of such events where severe radiation exposure has occurred. Advice can also be provided to national authorities on how to prepare and respond to such radiation accidents, or what kind of public health actions may be needed.

Emergency medical support for radiation exposed individuals is provided through WHO's Radiation Emergency Medical Preparedness and Assistance Network (REMPAN). This is activated following notification about a radiation accident with casualties (but even in case of a single victim with severe overexposure) from the IAEA or directly to WHO.

## NEWS

**World Radiography Day - Radiographers Care about YOUR Protection**  
[More information \[pdf 300kb\]](#)

**WHO calls for tighter standards on indoor radon**  
[More information](#)

**WHO Global Initiative on Radiation Safety in Health Care Settings**  
[More information](#)

## QUICK LINKS

**International Radon Project**  
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**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**  
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**Fact Sheets**  
[More information](#)

**Nuclear and radiological terrorism**  
[More information](#)

**Depleted Uranium (DU)**  
[Full text](#)

## CONTACT US

To provide feedback on our web site please [e-mail us](#).

#### USEFUL INFORMATION

[Radiation Emergency Guidelines \(English\) \[pdf 45kb\]](#)

[International Health Regulations - Radionuclear Emergencies](#)

Link to WHO IHR Resource Centre web site

[Radiation Emergency Assistance Centre/Training Site \(REAC/TS\)](#)

Part of the Oak Ridge Institute for Science, United States of America.

[Radiation Event Medical Management](#)

Link to a dedicated site by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

#### DOCUMENTS FOR DOWNLOAD

[Development of stockpiles for radiation emergencies - WHO report 2007 \[pdf 1.98Mb\]](#)

[Basics of radiation and radiation protection \[pdf 185kb\]](#)

[How to recognize and initially respond to an accidental radiation injury \[pdf 446kb\]](#)

High colour version

[How to recognize and initially respond to an accidental radiation injury \[pdf 330kb\]](#)

Low resolution version

These three leaflets are also available in other languages. You can send your request via email to [ionizingradiation@who.int](mailto:ionizingradiation@who.int).

[IAEA Publications on Accident Response](#)

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