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[NCI Home](#)

[Cancer Topics](#)

[Clinical Trials](#)

[Cancer Statistics](#)

[Research & Funding](#)

[News](#)

[About NCI](#)

Get the Facts About Exposure to I-131 Radiation



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Exposure to I-131 Radiation

[Introduction](#)

[How Americans Were Exposed to I-131](#)

[The Search for Answers](#)

[I-131's Rapid Breakdown](#)

[The Milk Connection](#)

[About Thyroid Disease](#)

[Thyroid and I-131](#)

[Who's at Risk?](#)

[How Do Doctors Diagnose and Treat Thyroid Cancer?](#)

Key Facts

[Taking Care of Yourself](#)

Page Options

[Print This Page](#)

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[View Entire Document](#)

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[NCI Drug Dictionary](#)

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NCI Highlights

Key Facts

Scientists know that:

- I-131 breaks down rapidly in the atmosphere and environment
- Exposure was highest in the first few days after each nuclear test explosion
- Most exposure occurred through drinking fresh milk
- People received little exposure from eating fruits and leafy vegetables as compared to drinking fresh milk because although I-131 was deposited on fruits and leafy vegetables, the I-131 in fallout was deposited only on the surface; people generally wash or peel fruits and leafy vegetables
- Thyroid cancer is uncommon, usually curable, and approximately 2 to 3 times more common in women


Reliable information about I-131's impact on human health has been difficult to collect, but scientists think that:

- Risk for thyroid cancer increases with exposure, but even among people exposed to I-131, few develop this cancer
- People exposed as children have a higher risk than people exposed as adults

[< Previous Section](#) | [Next Section >](#)

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[Tools for Health](#)
[Professionals](#)
[NCI Issues Cancer Trends](#)
[Progress Report: 2009/2010](#)
[Update](#)
[The Nation's Investment in](#)
[Cancer Research FY 2011](#)

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