



Research group gives recommendations to limit fallout exposure

By **Eartha Jane Melzer** | 04.11.11 / 3:39 pm | [More from The Michigan Messenger](#)

A French radiation research group is recommending that pregnant and nursing women and small children in Europe limit consumption of fresh milk and cheese and leafy vegetables in order to reduce exposure to radioactive fallout from the ongoing Fukushima nuclear disaster.

A [report by the research group CRIIRAD](#) states that spinach, cabbage and other vegetables with large surface areas are especially sensitive to iodine-131 contamination in rainwater, and that fresh milk and creamy cheeses can be contaminated if made from the milk of animals that have grazed on grass, [Euractiv.com](#) reports.

Consumption of these foods could lead to excess radiation exposure, particularly for children.

The Euratom Directive of 13 May 1996 establishes general principles and safety standards on radiation protection in Europe.

According to the directive, the impact of nuclear activity can be considered negligible if doses of radiation do not exceed ten micro sieverts (mSv) per year. Beyond this value, possible measures should be considered to reduce exposure, it says.

While radioactive iodine-131 is mostly present in the air in the form of gas, CRIIRAD notes that in the case of the Fukushima fallout, the main issue is to limit ingestion of iodine-131.

CRIIRAD notes that the amount of iodine-131 capable of delivering a dose of 10 mSv varies greatly depending on the age of consumers. Children up to two years old are the most vulnerable and ingestion of 50 becquerel (Bq) is enough to deliver to the body a dose of 10 mSv, according to the institute.

If the foods (leafy vegetables, milk etc.) contain between one and 10 Bq per kg or more, it is possible that the reference level of 10 mSv may be exceeded within two to three weeks, the institute added.

Radioactive iodine-131 values measured by the French Institute for Radiological Protection and Nuclear Safety (IRSN) in recent days show the following, varying levels of contamination: 0,08 Bq/kg in salad, spinach and leeks in Aix-en-Provence, 0,17 Bq per litre in milk in Lourdes and 2,1 Bq per litre in goats milk in Clansayes.

Data for the west coast of the United States, which received the Fukushima radioactive fallout 6-10 days before France, reveals that levels of radioactive iodine-131 concentration are 8-10 times higher there, the institute says.

Last week the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency found that milk in Phoenix and Little Rock contained [more than the maximum allowable level of iodine-131](#). It also found cesium-137 in milk from Vermont.

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