



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Trace Amounts of Radioactive Iodine Found in Vermont Air Samples

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Media Contact: Communication Office
Vermont Department of Health
802-863-7281

BURLINGTON, VT – Vermont joins New York and other New England states now reporting trace amounts of the radioisotope Iodine-131 coming from nuclear reactors damaged by the earthquake and tsunami in Japan on March 11.

The Vermont Department of Health Laboratory is analyzing 10 air samples from monitoring stations in Windham County and Burlington. So far, concentrations of I-131 have been detected in samples from Vernon, Brattleboro, Dummerston and Burlington, ranging in value from 0.03 to 0.05 picocuries per cubic meter. No other radioisotopes have been detected.

“Radioactivity resulting from the tragedy in Japan is being measured across the states, and now in Vermont,” said Health Commissioner Harry Chen, MD. “These are miniscule amounts compared to what we experience in everyday life. There is no health risk here, and no reason for anyone to take special precautions.”

Air sample measurements taken in Vermont are similar to those reported in Maine. If a person were to breathe I-131 in these concentrations year round, the dose is still about 100 times lower than what you could get in one round trip air flight across the country.

I-131 is present in nuclear reactors as a fission product. I-131 decays quickly, to half its strength in eight days, and to almost nothing in 80 days.

Harmful amounts of radioactivity from the events in Japan are still not expected to reach as far as the U.S. However, past events have shown that very small amounts of radioactivity carried by natural air currents may fall to the ground with rain or snow and build up very slowly over time in soil, sediment, fungi and other materials.

The Health Department has been tracking radiation levels in the environment since 1970, before the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Station was built. For this event, the Health Department is using its existing environmental radiological monitoring stations around Vermont Yankee – plus a new air monitoring station installed on March 17 in Burlington – and will report results at healthvermont.gov.

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Vermont Department of Health | 108 Cherry Street | Burlington, VT 05402
Voice: 802-863-7200 | In Vermont 800-464-4343 | Fax: 802-865-7754 | TTY/TDD: Dial 711 first
Health Care Provider Infectious Disease Reporting: 802-863-7240 or 800-640-4374
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