

## Potassium iodide tablets in the event of severe reactor accidents

During a severe accident in a nuclear power plant (reactor accident) large quantities of radioactive iodine are set free besides other radioactive substances. When radioactive iodine enters the body, it is taken up and stored in the thyroid gland. The thyroid gland can therefore be exposed to high levels of radiation and radiation-induced thyroid cancer may develop as a result.

## Intake of potassium iodide tablets protects the thyroid gland

If potassium iodide tablets are taken in time, the thyroid gland will be protected from radioactive iodine and prevents thyroid cancer from occurring. The stable form of iodine in these tablets temporarily saturates the thyroid gland with iodine, thus inhibiting the uptake of radioactive iodine.

## Effective only when taken at the correct time

The effectiveness of potassium iodide tablets is greatest when taken shortly before the radioactive cloud arrives. Delayed intake is the primary reason for a loss in effectiveness. If intake is even only a few after hours after a radioactive cloud has passed over, it is practically useless. Should a reactor accident happen near the border, unfavourable wind conditions can bring the radioactive plume to Austria within a few hours. It is therefore important to have the tablets at hand for such cases.

## Keeping it in stock will ensure timely intake

For over 20 years, the Federal Ministry of Health has been stockpiling potassium iodide tablets for the population. To ensure tablets are taken at the correct time, a two-tiered concept of stockpiling has been conceived, comprising the following:

- 1. Keeping a stockpile in schools and childcare facilities to ensure that children take the tablets early enough should a radioactive plume pass over during schooltime.
- 2. Keeping a stockpile at home for individuals below the age of 40\*, to ensure that the tablets are available at all times. The most important target groups (people under 18 years of age, pregnant or breastfeeding women) can get the tablets for free at any pharmacy; people between 18 and 40 years can buy them at a very low price.

Please be sure to get potassium iodide tablets for your household from the pharmacy without delay.

This is the only way you can protect yourself and your family in the case of a nuclear emergency.

IMPORTANT: Potassium iodide tablets are only intended for use in an emergency situation. By no means are the tablets intended for immediate or even constant use. Even in the case of a severe reactor accident, intake is only allowed if you expressly receive instruction from the health authorities (over the radio or television) to do so.

<sup>\*</sup> People above 40 years of age should not take potassium iodide tablets, because their risk of getting radiation-induced thyroid cancer is very low while their risk of experiencing severe side effects from the ingestion of iodine is relatively high.