

RADIOACTIVE CONTAMINATION AND EXPOSURE FACT SHEET

What is radioactive contamination?

It occurs when radioactive matter is deposited on or in an object or a person. Radioactive matter released into the area can cause air, water, any surface, soil, plants, buildings, people, or animals to become contaminated. There are two types of contamination: external and internal contamination.

What is external contamination?

External contamination occurs when radioactive material, in the form of dust, powder, or liquid comes into contact with a person's skin, hair, or clothing. These individuals can contaminate other people or surfaces that they touch.

What is internal contamination?

Internal contamination occurs when a person ingests or breathes in radioactive materials, or when radioactive materials enter the body through an open wound or absorb through the skin. Some types of radioactive materials stay in the body and are deposited in different organs. These individuals can expose people near them to radiation from the radioactive material inside their bodies.

What is radioactive exposure?

Radioactive materials give off a form of energy that travels in waves or particles. When a person is exposed to radiation, the energy penetrates the body. For example, when a person has an x-ray, he or she is exposed to radiation.

What steps should you take to limit contamination?

Since radiation cannot be seen, smelled, felt or tasted, people at the site of the incident will not know whether radioactive materials were involved. You can take the following steps to limit your contamination:

1. **Leave the area quickly.** Go inside the nearest safe building or to an area where you are directed by local authorities.
2. **Remove your outer layer of clothes.**
3. If possible, **place the clothes in a plastic bag or leave them in an out-of-the-way area**, such as the corner of a room. Keep any cuts and scratches covered when handling contaminated items to avoid getting radioactive material in them.
4. **Wash all of the exposed parts of your body** using lots of soap and lukewarm water to remove the contamination. This process is called decontamination. Try to avoid spreading contamination to parts of the body that may not be contaminated, such as areas that were clothed.

5. After local authorities determine that **internal contamination may have occurred**, you may be able to take medication to reduce the radioactive material in your body.

If you think that you have been exposed to radiation, please call your doctor or 911 right away. Do not drive yourself to the hospital as you may expose others to the radiation.

Where you can get more information?

www.bt.cdc.gov/radiation

www.dshs.state.tx.us

Source of information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)