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MDCH Makes Available Potassium Iodide Pills to Those Near Nuclear Power Plants

Lansing – The Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) is announcing the availability of potassium iodide pills to people living, working or visiting areas within 10 miles of the state's nuclear power plants.

In the unlikely event of a nuclear power plant incident, a radioactive iodine release could occur. Radioactive iodine can be stored in the thyroid gland, causing thyroid cancer or other thyroid related illnesses. A non-prescription drug called potassium iodide (also called "KI") can prevent these illnesses by reducing the thyroid gland's ability to absorb radioactive iodine. KI is effective only if taken within a few hours of exposure to radioactive iodine. If a General Emergency is declared at a nuclear power plant, taking KI is recommended as an additional health protective measure, supplementing other emergency measures such as evacuation and protection of the food supply.

Beginning Oct. 1, A one-day supply of potassium iodide will be available at no cost to all interested residents, employers, workers and visitors at Shoreline Pharmacy in South Haven and Meijer pharmacies in Monroe, Woodhaven, Benton Harbor and Michigan City, Indiana. The public is advised to store their potassium iodide pills in a safe place, along with other emergency supplies, so that they would be available if needed.

Residents, businesses and institutions within the ten mile emergency planning zones surrounding the plants are will soon receive a letter with information on how and where to receive their free supply of KI. More information on this program is posted at www.michigan.gov/KI. The locations of community forums where the public can learn about the program in person are posted on this Web site as well.

This program was made possible because of an offer from the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to provide KI free of charge to states with nuclear power plants.

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The states that accepted the NRC's offer were then responsible for determining the best method for making the KI available to the public in the 10-mile Emergency Planning Zones of their nuclear power plants. MDCH consulted with other state and local agencies to develop this plan for making the KI available now through local pharmacies.

"Our hope is that there will never be an accident where these pills would be needed," said MDCH Director Janet Olszewski. "By making KI available now, we are giving the public an opportunity to add an extra measure of protection to their emergency supplies."

"KI pills are not a cure-all," said Dr. Greg Holzman, MDCH Chief Medical Executive. "While they offer protection of the thyroid gland from radioactive iodine, they offer no protection to the body from other injuries during radiation exposure. Evacuation and sheltering are the primary modes of protection in a radiological emergency."

To date, 23 states including Michigan have accepted the KI offer from the NRC. Thirty-three states have Emergency Planning Zones surrounding nuclear power plants.

The risk of an accident at a nuclear power plant has not increased. In fact, the plants have undertaken increased security measures and are safer than ever. This KI distribution program simply adds a supplemental measure of protection for those who choose it.

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