Health Advisory Regarding Radiation Concerns
March 17, 2011

We understand that many of you are receiving calls from patients concerned about potential radiation health risks from the damaged nuclear reactors in Japan. Sonoma County Public Health is providing this guidance to assist local health care providers in responding to these patient concerns. The Sonoma County Department of Health Services is following the events in Japan closely through regular contact with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and other state and federal entities. We will provide updates as needed.

- The US Nuclear Regulatory Commission has stated that, at present, Japan’s nuclear emergency presents no danger to California. Even in the event of a significant release from the reactors in Japan, radiation levels reaching California are not expected to rise to levels that endanger health. The California Department of Public Health Radiologic Health Branch has ongoing radioactivity monitoring systems in place for the air, water and food supplies.

- CDPH and Sonoma County Public Health currently advise against the use of potassium iodide. It is not necessary given the fact that there is no anticipated risk of significant radiation exposure. Also, potassium iodide can cause significant adverse effects such as allergic reactions in individuals with allergies to iodine or shellfish. It also poses a risk to individuals with thyroid problems, and, taken inappropriately, can have serious side effects including arrhythmias, nausea, vomiting, electrolyte abnormalities and bleeding.

- California has a plan for response to radiological emergencies- the Nuclear Emergency Response Plan (http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/environmentalHealth/Documents/NERP/NERP.pdf). Sonoma County has emergency plans in coordination with the State and include procedures for the distribution of “medical countermeasures” when needed. California does stockpile emergency supplies, including potassium iodide (KI) tablets in regions around nuclear power plants, but as mentioned above KI is not recommended at this time.

People are understandably concerned or even frightened by the perception that radiation poses a risk to Californians. Unfortunately, these concerns are being fueled by rumors and misinformation. As health professionals, we can provide sound medical guidance to help calm these fears. This is also an important time to remind ourselves and patients to be prepared with an emergency plan and supplies in case of a similar local earthquake or other major disaster.

Health care providers can assist the patients and other members of the public with additional questions by directing them to:

- California Public Health Information Line (916) 341-3947
- Sonoma County Public Health Website: www.sonoma-county.org/ph
- Centers for Disease Control Radiation Emergencies website: http://emergency.cdc.gov/radiation

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