# POTASSIUM IODIDE (KI) QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PARENTS

1. **What is potassium iodide (KI)?**
   Potassium iodide is a U. S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved over-the-counter drug that can be used to protect the thyroid gland from immediate and future radiation injury caused by radioactive iodine released during a nuclear accident.

2. **How does KI work?**
   KI saturates the thyroid gland with stable (non-radioactive) iodine, thus preventing or reducing the amount of radioactive iodine that will be taken up by the thyroid. Radiological emergencies may release radioactive iodine into the environment. Since iodine concentrates in the thyroid gland, inhalation of air or ingestion of food contaminated with radioactive iodine can lead to injury to the thyroid, including an increased risk of thyroid cancer.

3. **Does KI protect individuals from all types of radiation?**
   No. KI is only effective against exposure to radioactive iodine. KI does not protect against other types of radiation.

4. **Does KI protect organs other than the thyroid?**
   No. KI does not protect body organs or tissues other than the thyroid.

5. **Is a prescription necessary?**
   No. KI is an FDA-approved over-the-counter drug.

6. **Should some people avoid KI?**
   Yes. According to the FDA, people with known iodine sensitivity, thyroid diseases, clusters of itchy skin blisters (dermatitis herpetiformis), and/or an inflammation in blood vessels involving the skin or multiple organs of the body (hypocomplementemic vasculitis) should avoid the use of KI.

7. **What are the possible side effects to KI?**
   According to the FDA, the benefits of taking KI far exceed the risks. The possible side effects may include stomach upset and minor rash.

8. **When is KI most effective?**
   To be most effective, KI should be taken shortly before or shortly after exposure to radioactive iodine. Even if taken three to four hours after exposure, it would still reduce radioactive iodine from being absorbed by the thyroid and still have a substantial effect.

9. **How long is KI effective in the body?**
   The protective effects of KI last approximately 24 hours.

10. **Is KI an alternative to evacuation?**
    No. Evacuation remains the primary protective action in a radiological emergency.

11. **What happens if the ten-mile Emergency Planning Zone (EPZ) cuts through the school district?**
    Only school buildings located within the ten-mile EPZ will receive KI from the New York State Emergency Management Office (SEMO).

12. **Who may administer the KI to children?**
    Designated individuals in the school may administer the KI to children once recommended by the New York State and/or County Department of Health in an emergency situation.

13. **Is a physician's order necessary for KI administration in a radiological emergency?**
    No. KI administration in a school is part of an emergency protocol to deal with a radioactive iodine release into the environment.

14. **What if a child can't swallow pills?**
    The pill may be safely crushed and given with juice, applesauce, etc. in the event that an individual cannot swallow it. It may also be easily dissolved in water.

15. **How will schools be notified that events warrant the administration of KI to children?**
    The State Department of Health and/or County Department of Health are charged with issuing the recommendation to administer KI in the event radioactive iodine is released into the environment.

16. **Will the adults in the school building also be provided with KI?**
    Yes. KI will be provided to all adults in school buildings located within the ten-mile EPZ. However, according to the FDA, it is not necessary for persons over 40 years of age to take KI in a radiological emergency.