

Frequently Asked Questions

Radioactive Iodine Treatment (I-131)

The following provides answers to some of the frequently asked questions about treatment of thyroid conditions with radioactive iodine (I-131). The guidelines below are for a broad range of patients. Specific guidelines for your treatment should be discussed with your radiologist.

Why can't I be around people?

Staying away from people helps minimize the radiation exposure to others.

Do I need to be completely separated from people?

Can I be in the same room?

While complete separation is recommended for 2 to 7 days depending on the amount of iodine you receive, it is not always practical. If it is impractical to be completely apart, you can minimize the exposure to others by:

1. Maximizing the *distance* from others
2. Minimizing the amount of *time* you are around others
3. Using physical barriers (e.g. furniture, building structures) to provide *shielding* for others

When can I be around people again?

The optimal times will vary from 2 to 7 days depending on the amount of iodine you receive, as outlined by the radiologist. If you can't follow the guideline, then you should observe the *time*, *distance*, *shielding* criteria outlined above.

How long before I can have sex?

Follow the same criteria as above.

Can I stay in a hotel?

Hotel stays are not recommended; it is preferred you stay in a private residence after treatment.

When can I travel?

You should wait 7 days before using various forms of public transportation, unless otherwise directed by your radiologist. Again, if this is impractical, use the *time*, *distance*, *shielding* precautions above. Air travel during this time is strongly discouraged.

Can I exercise immediately after treatment?

Avoid vigorous exercise and excessive sweating for 3 to 4 days following treatment. This will reduce the exposure to others through contamination in your sweat.

When can I drive with my children?

You should wait the 2 to 7 days as prescribed by the radiologist. Again, if this is impractical, use the *time*, *distance*, *shielding* precautions.

Will I set off alarms at airports, ferries, government buildings, border crossing, etc.?

You may trigger radiation monitors at various locations for up to 3 months after treatment. Your radiologist will provide you with a "Radiation Travel Letter" to carry with you.

How is my body affected by I-131?

Although the majority of the radioactive iodine is concentrated in the thyroid cells, it is cleared from your body through your urine and small amounts will be present in other bodily fluids, such as saliva and sweat.

Can I have my pets around me?

While it's best to use similar precautions as with people, it is not as critical. But it is important to prevent your pet from ingesting any fluids that may contain iodine, such as drinking from your toilet or licking sweaty skin.

What if I throw up after my treatment?

If more than 2 hours after treatment, it should not be a concern. If within 2 hours of treatment, call the Nuclear Medicine department for further instructions, (206) 223-6901.

Why can't I breast feed before my treatment?

Radioactive iodine accumulates in the mammary glands, which produce milk, so breast feeding increases radiation exposure to breast tissue. As a radiation safety precaution, stop breast feeding and pumping 8 weeks prior to treatment to stop milk production and minimize exposure. In addition, we recommend that you do NOT start breast feeding again after treatment for this child. Breast feeding future children is fine.

What about pregnancy or birth control?

Women should abstain from sex or use birth control for 10 days before the treatment and should not get pregnant for 6 months after the treatment. A blood pregnancy test will be done on the day of treatment if appropriate per guidelines.