

Radiation Emergency Preparedness Tools: Psychological First Aid

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC - safer, healthier people.

Hi. I'm Leeanna Allen, a health education specialist with the Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education, working with the CDC's Radiation Studies Branch. Today, we're talking about the potential psychological consequences of radiation disasters. We'll also discuss how critical the management of these consequences are to the success of a response effort. Anyone who may be working with survivors of a radiation disaster can benefit from being trained in psychological first aid. It's important for public health professionals, clinicians, first responders, and volunteers who may respond to a radiation disaster.

Psychological issues following radiation disasters are unique because of the public's intense fear of radiation, strong sense of fatalism, and social stigma attached to persons exposed or contaminated. The greatest impact of a radiation disaster may be psychosocial. Psychological first aid in radiation emergencies helps survivors put radiation risks in perspective. Psychological first aid uses basic information-gathering techniques to help make rapid assessments of survivors' immediate concerns and needs.

CDC has developed a multimedia training program, entitled "Psychological First Aid in Radiation Disasters" to help clinical and public health professionals better prepare for radiation emergencies. This program is meant to serve as a supplement for people who have had previous training or experience in psychological first aid or disaster mental health. We invite you to explore this training and consider the mental health component as a key part of your disaster planning and preparation for all types of radiation disasters—natural, technological, or those caused by terrorists.

In the training, we hear from people who have first-hand experience in real radiation emergencies - a physician, who observed the tragic 1987 radiation disaster in Goiânia, Brazil, and a psychologist and his son who lived near the Three Mile Island nuclear power reactor in Pennsylvania which had an accident in 1979. The training also provides scenarios to illustrate how psychological first aid principles can be used in a variety of response settings, including a public health call center, a community reception center, and a hospital.

CDC's Radiation Studies Branch has more information on this and other practical tools for radiation emergency preparedness. Visit emergency.cdc.gov/radiation to learn more. Additional resources for healthcare providers are also available on the COCA Website at emergency.cdc.gov/coca.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.

