

# Uranium

## What is it:

Uranium is a radioactive metal that is present in low amounts in rocks, soil, water, plants, and animals. Uranium and its decay products contribute to low levels of natural background radiation in the environment. Significant concentrations of uranium occur naturally in some substances such as phosphate deposits and uranium-enriched ores. Uranium is found in different forms, called isotopes. Uranium is found in the environment as uranium-234, uranium-235, and uranium-238.

## How is it used:

Uranium-235 is used in nuclear weapons and nuclear reactors.

**Greater Detail:** Uranium may be used in ammunition for military, guidance devices and compasses. Small amounts of uranium are used in photography. In the past, uranium was used in ceramics as a coloring agent.

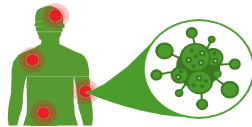
## How does the contaminant travel:

Uranium-238 and members of its decay chain, which include uranium-234, radium-226, and radon-220, are present in nature. Concentrated uranium products, which are generated at uranium mill tailing sites and uranium processing facilities, are potential sources of exposure to individuals and the environment. Potential individual exposure at these sites may be from different pathways, but the groundwater pathway is of particular concern because of the mobility of uranium.



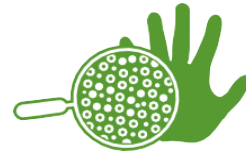
## How do you know you have been exposed:

Uranium can enter the body when it is inhaled or swallowed or through cuts in the skin. Alpha particles released by uranium cannot penetrate the skin, so natural uranium that is outside the body is less harmful than that which is inhaled, swallowed, or enters through the skin.



## How can you reduce the risk of exposure:

The most important way families can reduce their exposure is to know about the sources of uranium and avoid locations of known radiation.



**Source:** United States Environmental Protection Agency. EPA Facts about Uranium.