DALLAS — No matter how small the possibility of radiation from Japan actually reaching the West Coast of the United States — much less here in Texas — but that hasn’t stopped North Texans from pushing the panic button.

News 8 checked with several pharmacies on Wednesday and they are already out of stock of potassium iodide, which can protect the thyroid if there are toxic radiation levels present.

But there can be a danger for people who elect to take this medicine.

If you ingest potassium iodide now — with no risk in the air here — you are subject to serious side effects, according to Wayne McMeans, a pharmacist at Dougherty's Pharmacy in North Dallas.
McMeans has been getting a lot of requests for over-the-counter potassium iodide, which protects against radiation exposure. The mad dash to the pharmacy occurred right after the earthquake in Japan rattled nuclear reactors, leading some Texans to fear that radiation could spread here, more than 6,000 miles away from the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant.

The shelves at Dougherty's are empty where the iodine treatment is sold; the store ran out on Sunday. "We couldn't buy enough to supply all the phone calls," McMeans said.

Store employee Aubrey McDaniel purchased the last bottle. "You just see all the threats on the news, and you just never know if it could reach Texas or not, but I just wanted to be safe," McDaniel said.

But McMeans offered this warning: "Remember, potassium iodide is protecting only the thyroid gland, so if you have a situation where radioactivity is high, you have lots of other organs that could be affected."

Dr. Rasool Kenarangui, who teaches nuclear engineering at the University of Texas at Arlington, showed us how hard it would be for the wind or a jet stream to carry radiation all the way from the coast of Japan to America's shoreline. "If you go farther away so you don't have that radiation, they don't travel," he said. "At this time, based on amount of release, I think it is less chance."

"I don't want people to panic," McMeans urged. "The government has not indicated that we have a serious radioactive problem."

The pharmacist says North Texans can put potassium iodide in their first aid kits as a precaution, but he says it is not wise to just start popping the pills.

The medication can lead to side effects like intestinal problems, rashes, and salivary and thyroid problems.

A small over-the-counter shipment arrives at Dougherty Pharmacy on Friday. Their supplier says medical communities are ordering it for people who really need it — people who could be traveling to Japan's disaster area.

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