

working with tritium safely

Radioactive half-life $T_{1/2}$

12.3 years

Principal emission

19 keV beta (maximum)

Monitoring for contamination

Swabs counted by liquid scintillation

Biological monitoring

Urine samples

20 mSv annual limit on intake by inhalation

4.9×10^8 Bq (~ 13 mCi)

Shielding required

Consistent with avoiding direct contact

Special considerations

- Due to its low beta-energy, tritium is difficult to monitor directly, and therefore regular swabbing and counting of the work area is advisable.
- Tritium compounds can be absorbed readily through the skin.
- Always follow the ten golden rules.



The data provided is general information that gives a basic understanding of radiation safety. You must however consult your local radiation safety expert to ensure that you comply with all national regulations and local rules. All numbers are taken from The Radionuclide and Radiation Protection Data Handbook 2002, Radiation Protection Dosimetry, Vol 98(1), Nuclear Technology Publishing, (2002).



10 golden rules

rule	other considerations
1. Understand the nature of the hazard and get practical training.	Never work with unprotected cuts or breaks in the skin, particularly on the hands or forearms. Never use any mouth-operated equipment in any area where unsealed radioactive material is used. Always store compounds under the conditions recommended. Label all containers clearly, indicating nuclide, compound, specific activity, total activity, date, and name of user. Containers should be properly sealed.
2. Plan ahead to minimize time spent handling radioactivity.	Carry out a dummy run without radioactivity to check your procedures (the shorter the time, the smaller the dose).
3. Distance yourself appropriately from sources of radiation.	Doubling the distance from the source quarters the radiation dose (The Inverse Square Law).
4. Use appropriate shielding for the type of radiation.	1-cm perspex/plexiglas will stop all beta particles but it is important to be aware of Bremsstrahlung from high-energy beta-emitters. Use suitable thickness of lead or lead acrylic shielding for X-ray and γ emitters.
5. Contain radioactive materials within defined work areas.	Always keep active and inactive work separated as far as possible, preferably by maintaining rooms used solely for radioactive work. Always work over a spill tray within a ventilated enclosure. These rules may be relaxed for small (a few tens of kBq) quantities of ^3H -, ^{35}S -, ^{33}P -, ^{14}C -, and ^{125}I -labelled compounds in a non-volatile form in solution.
6. Wear appropriate protective clothing and dosimeters.	Laboratory overalls, safety glasses, and surgical gloves must be worn at all times. However, beware of static charge on gloves when handling fine powders. Local rules will define which dosimeters should be worn (e.g. body film badge or thermo-luminescent extremity dosimeter for work with high energy beta-emitters).
7. Monitor the work area frequently for contamination control.	In the event of a spill follow the prepared contingency plan: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Verbally warn all people in the vicinity ii. Restrict unnecessary movement into and through the area iii. Report the spill to the Radiation Protection Supervisor/Adviser iv. Treat contaminated personnel first v. Follow clean-up protocol.
8. Follow the local rules and safe ways of working.	Do not eat, drink, smoke, or apply cosmetics in an area where unsealed radioactive substances are handled. Use paper wipes and dispose of them appropriately. Never pipette radioactive solutions by mouth. Always work carefully and tidily.
9. Minimize accumulation of waste and dispose of it by appropriate routes.	Use the minimum quantity of radioactivity needed for the investigation. Disposal of all radioactive waste is subject to statutory control. Be aware of the requirements and use only authorized routes of disposal.

