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'Enormous' run on iodine pills in US: drug firm

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The main US manufacturer of potassium iodide tablets has run out of stock after a massive demand generated by the Japanese nuclear crisis, the company's head said Wednesday.

Anbex was flooded with thousands of orders for its Iosat drug after last Friday's earthquake and tsunami, which has triggered an ongoing crisis at the Fukushima nuclear plant in northeastern Japan.

"The spike is enormous ... we were out of stock by Friday night," said Alan Morris, president of Anbex which supplies the drug to individuals and retailers, including online.

"The demand mostly is coming from the west coast of the US, but there are a significant number of inquiries, requests, orders coming from Japan, Korea, all over the Far East," he told AFP.

Morris said manufacturers hoped to have new stocks of the drug -- which protects against radiation leaked from the Japanese power plant -- ready to ship in about two weeks' time.

His company was the only US manufacturer of potassium in pill form, he said, adding that there was a liquid form available from a company called Fleming Pharmaceuticals.

A statement on the Fleming's website said the firm was "running nearly around the clock as employees ship potassium iodide to Japan."

The run on iodine drugs came as the head of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission warned that there is no water left in the spent fuel pool of reactor 4 at the Fukushima plant, resulting in "extremely high" radiation levels.

US authorities have repeatedly said there is minimal risk of radioactivity reaching the US mainland, while meteorologists say it is difficult to predict exactly how far a radioactive cloud would spread across the Pacific.

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