

Day Care Centre in Fukushima City



Yokiko Shida works in a day-care centre for pre-school age children in Fukushima City, 90 km from the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear site.

“For the first six months after the accident, the children were not allowed outside, and they were told not to run or disturb soil when on their way to and from the centre. All over Fukushima prefecture, children were totally banned from playing in water, not because the water might have been contaminated, but because the children would be virtually naked and they would

lose the protection from radiation offered by their clothing.”

“Over the summer of 2011, the sand in the sandpit was decontaminated, and the walls and roof of the day care centre washed by pressure water sprays; radiation levels then fell to between 0.5 and 0.7 μSv / hour. The staff of the day care centre decontaminated the outdoor play equipment (by washing the slide, swings, etc) and monitored radiation levels regularly. From the autumn of 2011, the children were allowed to play outdoors for 30 – 40 minutes a day, but they had to wear different clothes for playing outside from those worn inside.”

“A lot of children were voluntarily evacuated by their parents, but a year after the accident those children started to return to the day care centre. Now nearly all have come back, but some are still living elsewhere. The radiation level around the day care centre is now around 0.1 μSv / hour, almost back to pre-accident levels. It is frequently checked by staff, but the children are usually allowed unrestricted play outside.”

“All staff at all pre-school centres in Fukushima prefecture were issued with a booklet telling us how to answer any questions that the children had about radiation and its effects*. We have noticed that many children have not developed as usual – they have less physical strength, and poorer mobility and dexterity skills. We have tried to find alternative activities for them to make up for what they have lost from outdoor play, as well as taking them on trips to radioactively clean areas for them to play outdoors. The children enjoy simple outdoor play – touching soil, rocks, playing in streams, petting animals, etc, just like any children, but they cannot do these things here.”

* about 1 out of 3 Japanese people die as a result of cancer, radiation occurs naturally in the environment, is used beneficially in medicine, and that nuclear power is necessary