Fukushima gov't forced to reveal children's thyroid gland tests

FUKUSHIMA - The Fukushima Prefectural Government has been forced to reveal children's thyroid gland tests to an NPO after refusing to release the results carried out following the Fukushima nuclear disaster, it has been learned.

The prefectural government had previously insisted results public would be an invasion of privacy. However, prefectural ordinance on the release of information data did not qualify to be withheld, forcing the prefecture to release it.

The data covers ultrasound tests for lumps and other abnormalities, with four levels of diagnoses. The results are listed by municipality for 38,114 children tested in the 2011 fiscal year. The data was put together in April last year by Fukushima Medical University, which is charged with conducting the tests.

Yukiko Miki, president of the NPO Access-Info Clearinghouse Japan, demanded the release of the results in December last year, and they were given to the NPO in late January.

Some differences are seen in the results across municipalities. The ratio of children who were diagnosed "B," which meant they had lumps of more than five millimeters and would be subjected to further tests, ranged from 0 to 1.7 percent. The ratio for "A2," which meant they had lumps of under five millimeters, ranged from 25.2 to 41.6 percent.

Professor Toshihide Tsuda of Okayama University, an expert on pollution investigations, says, "Although we cannot say anything for certain based on numbers from a single round of tests, this is important special information in looking into the causal relationships between the spread of radioactive material ( iodine-131) and the incidence of thyroid gland cancer. The regular release of information is necessary for keeping tabs on health changes."

Regarding the release of the data, a representative for the regional government's department for management of prefectural citizens' health said, "We made our decision based on ordinance rules." The prefectural ordinance on information disclosure says that government documents that could cause misunderstanding or confusion among prefectural residents should not be released, but the thyroid gland test results were judged to fall outside that criteria.

Despite the fact the data was already released to the NPO, at a press conference on Feb. 13, Fukushima Medical University's professor Shinichi Suzuki, who holds responsibility for the tests, refused to reveal the test results, saying "individual areas would be identified (as having higher incidence of lump detection), causing problems for those who were tested."
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