X Ray Encyclopedia Article

X Ray

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X Ray

Discovered in 1895 by German physicist Wilhelm K. Roentgen, x rays are a form of electromagnetic radiation, widely used in medicine, industry, metal detectors, and scientific research. X rays are most commonly used by doctors and dentists to make pictures of bones, teeth, and internal organs in order to find breaks in bones, evidence of disease, and cavities in teeth.

Since x rays are a form of **ionizing radiation**, they can be very dangerous. They penetrate into, and are absorbed by, plants and animals and can age, damage, and destroy living tissue. They can also cause skin burns, genetic mutations, **cancer**, and death at high levels of exposure. The effects of ionizing radiation tend to be cumulative, and every dose adds to the possibility of further damage.

Some authorities feel that people should try to minimize their exposure to such radiation and avoid being xrayed unless absolutely necessary. This is especially true of pregnant women, since studies show a much higher rate of childhood **leukemia** and other diseases among children who were exposed to x rays in utero. Ironically, fear of malpractice suits has prompted many doctors to increase the number of x rays performed while examining patients for disease.

See Also

Radiation Exposure