



# WHO: Cell phone use can increase possible cancer risk

(CNN) -- Radiation from cell phones can possibly cause cancer, according to the World Health Organization. The agency now lists mobile phone use in the same "carcinogenic hazard" category as lead, engine exhaust and chloroform.

Before its announcement Tuesday, WHO had assured consumers that no adverse health effects had been established.

A team of 31 scientists from 14 countries, including the United States, made the decision after reviewing peer-reviewed studies on cell phone safety. The team found enough evidence to categorize personal exposure as "possibly carcinogenic to humans."

What that means is that right now there haven't been enough long-term studies conducted to make a clear conclusion if radiation from cell phones are safe, but there is enough data showing a possible connection that consumers should be alerted.

"The biggest problem we have is that we know most environmental factors take several decades of exposure before we really see the consequences," said Dr. Keith Black, chairman of neurology at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles.

The type of radiation coming out of a cell phone is called non-ionizing. It is not like an X-ray, but more like a very low-powered microwave oven.

"What microwave radiation does in most simplistic terms is similar to what happens to food in microwaves, essentially cooking the brain. So in addition to leading to a development of cancer and tumors, there could be a whole host of other effects like cognitive memory function, since the memory temporal lobes are where we hold our cell phones."

The voices urging caution to consumers have gotten louder in recent years.

The European Environmental Agency has pushed for more studies, saying cell phones could be as big a public health risk as smoking, asbestos and leaded gasoline. The head of a prominent cancer-research institute at the University of Pittsburgh sent a memo to all employees urging them to limit cell phone use because of a possible risk of cancer.

"When you look at cancer development -- particularly brain cancer -- it takes a long time to develop. I think it is a good idea to give the public some sort of warning that long-term exposure to radiation from your cell phone could possibly cause cancer," said Dr. Henry Lai, research professor in bioengineering at University of Washington who has studied radiation for over 30 years.

Results from the largest international study on cell phones and cancer was released in 2010. It showed participants in the study who used a cell phones for 10 years or more had doubled the rate of brain glioma, a type of tumor. To date, there have been no long-term studies on the effects of cell phone usage among children.

"Childrens' skulls and scalps are thinner. So the radiation can penetrate deeper into the brain of children and young adults. Their cells are dividing faster rate, so the impact of radiation can be much larger." said Black of Cedars-Sinai Medical Center.

Manufacturers of many popular cell phones already warn consumers to keep their device away from their body.

The Apple iPhone 4 safety manual says for users' radiation exposure to not exceed FCC guidelines, "When using iPhone near your body for voice calls or for wireless data transmission over a cellular network, keep iPhone at least 15 mm (5/8 inch) away from the body."

BlackBerry Bold advises users to, "keep the BlackBerry device at least 0.98 in. (25 mm) from your body when the BlackBerry device is transmitting."

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