
World cancer research agency finds possible link between mobile phones and cancer

Australians should not be alarmed about findings released today (1 June) from an expert group classifying mobile phones as “possibly carcinogenic to humans”, according to Cancer Council Australia.

Cancer Council Scientific Advisor and international carcinogens expert, Professor Bernard Stewart, said the findings released by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), found a “possible link” between mobile phones and cancer, but not a proven one.

The announcement follows an eight day meeting of 31 scientists from 14 countries, who reviewed the results of hundreds of studies covering exposure to radio frequency electromagnetic fields.

“These findings show limited evidence linking mobile phones to glioma and acoustic neuroma and inadequate evidence to draw conclusions for any other types of cancer,” Professor Stewart said. “However, it does sound a warning bell and highlights the need more research in this area.”

According to Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data, brain cancer incidence has remained steady over a 25 year period to 2007, between 6.3 and 7.3 cases per 100,000 Australians.

Chair of Cancer Council Australia’s Occupation and Environmental Cancer Committee, Terry Slevin, said while IARC’s classification was possible rather than proven risk, it would be prudent for mobile phone users, particularly heavy users, to take measures to minimise any potential risk.

“There are practical measures people can take such as using hands free devices and more texting as an option to voice calls,” he said. “We would also urge greater caution for children using mobile phones as their brain tissue is still developing.

“However, these findings need to be put in context. While we need to continue researching the possible link between mobile phones and cancer, it is important to remind people there are many more established cancer risk factors that we can take action every day. Strong action on clear cancer risks like tobacco, alcohol, excessive UV exposure and obesity remain a priority.”

IARC’s findings follow results released last year from the largest international study to date into mobile phone use, which has found no evidence that normal use of mobile phones, for a period up to 12 years, can cause brain cancer.

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