



Written by [Brian Farmer](#) on October 2, 2008

Scientists Warn Congress of Cellphone Cancer Risk

However, society "must not repeat the situation we had with the relationship between smoking and lung cancer where we ... waited until every 'i' was dotted and 't' was crossed before warnings were issued," warned David Carpenter, director of the Institute of Health and Environment at the University of Albany, in testimony on September 25 before a subcommittee of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Reform.



Ronald Herberman, director of the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute, said that most studies "claiming that there is no link between cell phones and brain tumors are outdated, had methodological concerns, and did not include sufficient numbers of long-term cell phone users." Many studies denying such a link defined regular cellphone use to be as little as "once a week," he said.

"Recalling the 70 years that it took to remove lead from paint and gasoline and the 50 years that it took to convincingly establish the link between smoking and lung cancer, I argue that we must learn from our past to do a better job of interpreting evidence of potential risk," said Herberman.

Carpenter and Herberman both told the committee that the brain cancer risk from cellphone use is far greater for children than for adults because their brains are growing rapidly and their skulls are thinner. Herberman held up a model for lawmakers showing how radiation from a cell phone penetrates far deeper into the brain of a five-year-old than that of an adult.

The committee was shown several European studies, particularly surveys from Scandinavia, where the cellphone was first developed, which show that the radiation emitted by cellphones have definite biological consequences. For example, a 2008 study by Swedish cancer specialist Lennart Hardell found that frequent cellphone users are twice as likely to develop a tumor on the auditory nerves of the ear most used with the handset, compared to the other ear.

A separate study in Israel determined that heavy cellphone users had a 50-percent increased likelihood in developing a salivary gland tumor.

In addition, a paper published this month by the Royal Society in London found that adolescents who start using cellphones before the age of 20 were five times more likely to develop brain cancer at the age of 29 than those who didn't use a cell phone. "It's only on the side of the head where you use the cellphone," Carpenter said.

The testimony of Carpenter and Herberman came four months after three prominent neurosurgeons



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appeared on Larry King Live and told the CNN interviewer that they did not hold cellphones next to their ears. Dr. Keith Black, a surgeon at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, said, "I think the safe practice is to use an earpiece so you keep the microwave antenna away from your brain."

Dr. Vini Khurana, an associate professor of neurosurgery at the Australian National University, said, "I use it on the speaker-phone mode. I do not hold it to my ear." CNN's chief medical correspondent, Dr. Sanjay Gupta, a neurosurgeon at Emory University Hospital in Atlanta, added that he also uses an earpiece.

What do those brain surgeons know about cellphone safety that the rest of us don't? Louis Slesin, editor of Microwave News, gives us a clue when he says, "What we're seeing is suggestions in epidemiological studies that have looked at people using phones for ten or more years. There are some very disconcerting findings that suggest a problem."

Those on the other side of the issue point out that, while some of the research suggests a link between cellphone use and certain types of tumors, all of those cancers are rare, so, even if cellphone use does increase risk, the risk is still very low. However, the fear is that, while the individual risk of using a cell phone is relatively low, with three billion users worldwide, even a low risk would translate into a major public health concern.

"We cannot say with any certainty that cell phones are either safe or not safe," Dr. Black said on Larry King Live. "My concern is that, with the widespread use of cell phones, the worst scenario would be that we get the definitive study ten years from now."



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