

World Health Organization Says Cell Phones a “Possible Cause of Cancer”

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The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), part of the World Health Organization, has concluded that using cell phones may possibly cause cancer. The agency classifies exposure to radiofrequency (RF) electromagnetic fields, which includes cell phone use, as “possibly carcinogenic to humans.” Also in this category are gasoline exhaust and coffee.

A team of 31 scientists from 14 countries reached the conclusion after studying hundreds of scientific articles on the cancer-causing potential of RF fields, which include cell phones. It found limited evidence of a possible connection between cell phone use and a kind of malignant brain tumor called a glioma.

One of the studies examined for the report, which looked at cell phone use in several countries prior to 2004, showed that the heaviest cell phone users at the time had a higher risk for gliomas. Heavy use was defined as 30 minutes per day for 10 years. But the team says more long-term studies are needed before any definite links between cell phone use and cancer could be made.

Otis W. Brawley, MD, chief medical officer of the American Cancer Society, comments that the report reached reasonable conclusions, and that its findings need to be interpreted with great care. Dr. Brawley notes the classification means that there could be some risk, but that the evidence is not strong enough to confirm the link, and needs to be researched further. “The bottom line is the evidence is enough to warrant concern, but it is not conclusive.”

Dr. Brawley also explains that there are things people who are concerned about radiofrequency exposure can do to limit their exposure, including using an ear piece and limiting cell phone use, especially for children. “Given that the evidence remains uncertain, it is up to each individual to determine what changes they wish to make, if any, after weighing the potential benefits and risks of using a cell phone,” he concludes.

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