



Mobiles get all-clear on cancer – for now

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Medical Reporter

SHORT-TERM mobile phone use does not cause brain cancer, and talking on a mobile while driving is no more dangerous than having a passenger in the car.

These are the findings of one of the world's largest studies into the possible health risks of mobile technology.

The six-year \$21 million Mobile Telecommunications and Health Research program conducted by British scientists found no association between brain cancer and people who have used mobile phones for less than 10 years. But the risk of long-term mobile phone exposure was still unclear, they said.

Cancer symptoms are rarely detectable until 10 to 15 years after the cancer-producing event, so it is too early to say for certain whether mobile phones could lead to cancer or other diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, the report said.

Further research into the effect of mobile phone use on children was needed because it was possible that children may have different or stronger reactions to mobile signals than do adults, the report said.

Previous research has been unable to pinpoint the exact effects of mobile phone use on

people's health.

The program's scientists completed 23 studies into the effects of mobile phones on brain function, the risk of developing tumours, electrical hypersensitivity and the ability to drive.

The studies showed that exposure to radiofrequency fields from mobile phones did not lead to negative effects on brain functions such as response times and memory.

They found no association between exposure to mobile phones or base stations and the onset of electrical hypersensitivity, a condition in which some people experience headaches, dizziness and tingling symptoms after exposure to weak electromagnetic fields from computer monitors, televisions and mobile phone base stations and handsets.

The author of the report and chairman of the MTHR program, Professor Lawrie Challis, said more research was needed on the safety of communications systems used by emergency services.

The use of mobile phones while driving was found to require greater cognitive function. But phone use was no more dangerous than other distractions such as adjusting interior

controls or passenger noise, the studies found.

The research program was funded by the British Government and the mobile phone industry. Each of the studies has been published in peer-reviewed journals.

Professor Andrew Wood, of the Brain Sciences Institute at Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, said the results would reduce some concerns about the safety of mobile phone use. But there were still questions about long-term use of mobile phones and the effect on children.

"Children as young as four or five years old are now using handsets and they represent a stage when their nervous systems are still developing," he said.

As research director at the Australian Centre for Radiofrequency Bioeffects Research, Dr Wood said he had found some results similar to the British studies. But in one study he found significant changes in cognition as a result of exposure to radiofrequency fields.

Bruce Armstrong, Professor of Public Health at Sydney University, said the research showed no evidence that mobile phones affected cells and tissue beyond simply heating them.