

Parliamentary report warns cellphones, Wi-Fi a serious health issue

BY TIFFANY CRAWFORD, VANCOUVER SUN JUNE 18, 2015

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Cellphones and Wi-Fi could be causing cancer, infertility and learning disabilities, but there is not enough evidence to suggest lowering levels, according to a new Parliamentary report.

Photograph by: Justin Sullivan, Getty Images Files

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Yet, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health (HESA) report says the government must address this serious public health issue.

The report, delivered Tuesday, made 12 recommendations, including that the government take measures to reduce children and infants' exposure to wireless radiation. It also recommends Canadian doctors be taught to recognize the symptoms associated with using common wireless devices, and that parents be educated about the risks of wireless radiation.

The signal used for wireless communication is RF electromagnetic radiation (EMR.) The electromagnetic spectrum spans from high energy X-rays and gamma rays at one end to lower energy radio waves and microwaves at the other, with visible light in between.

While the expert panel concluded that there is not enough science-based evidence to recommend lowering the limits of RF radiation, it found that more efforts should be undertaken to reduce exposure in children under 14.

The report also says the federal government should collaborate with health departments of the provinces and territories, examine existing cancer data collection methods to improve the collection of information relating to wireless device use and cancer.

"This committee finally gave a voice to the scientists," said Frank Clegg, CEO of Canadians for Safe Technology, in a statement. "It reached across party lines to tell Canadians we deserve to be protected. Health Canada has to stop hiding behind the worst countries on this issue, and instead catch up with countries like France and Belgium where you can't market a cellphone to children anymore, or expose children to Wi-Fi in a daycare."

Responding to the parliamentary report, the Canadian Wireless Telecommunications Association said the committee heard a minority view on the issue.

"The recommendations in the Committee's report certainly do not reflect the vast majority of scientific evidence as accepted by the international scientific community," CWTA spokesman Marc Choma said in an email. "It is unfortunate that a disproportionate number of witnesses invited to appear before the Committee represented the minority view concerning the science on this topic.

"The overwhelming evidence in the credible scientific community, as determined and published in studies worldwide, continues to support the conclusion that there is no demonstrated public health risk associated with the use of wireless technologies."

Choma said the signal levels from wireless devices are "well below the safety limits established by Health Canada and other international governmental departments."

During the hearing, experts noted that Canada is falling behind other countries in protecting children and infants, for example France, where Wi-Fi has been banned in nurseries and daycare, and Taiwan where children under the age of two are prohibited from using electronic devices. Belgium has banned the sale and marketing of cellphones to children.

The committee also recommends that federal workplaces recognize employees who have developed electro-hypersensitivity.

The World Health Organization's (WHO) International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) has classified RF exposure as a possible human carcinogen. Rob Tarzwell, a professor at the Faculty of Medicine at the University of British Columbia supported this finding, and said there is limited evidence of a causal link between carcinogenicity and RF exposure, "meaning the quality of the evidence is limited."

The debate about whether Wi-Fi poses a health risk to students has been going on for several years in B.C. Three years ago, Terry Berting, former president of the B.C. Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils, said he received emails every day from parents with Wi-Fi concerns following warnings about the dangers of RF radiation in schools from the American Academy of Environmental Medicine.

Provincial health officer Dr. Perry Kendall has previously made suggestions to schools and parents concerned over the lack of evidence. Those include limiting Wi-Fi to certain times or locations, turning it off when not in use, and to disconnect Wi-Fi in rooms that don't have computers.

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