

Parliamentary report calls for action on Wi-Fi

A committee of parliamentarians from all the major political parties have released a report describing safety risks from cellphones and Wi-Fi as “a serious public health issue” that warrants firm government action to help the public use “wireless devices in a manner that protects their health and the health of their families.”

The report from the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health issued [12 recommendations](#) to the Government of Canada was released June 18. After hearing conflicting testimony from federal officials and numerous other witnesses over three days of hearings, the committee did not recommend Health Canada change the safety limits on radio frequency exposure.

However, the 10-member committee suggests that an independent scientific body recognized by Health Canada examine “whether measures taken and guidelines provided in other countries, such as France and Israel, to limit the exposure of vulnerable populations, including infants, and young children in the school environment, to radio frequencies should be adopted in Canada.”

And, in a move that [echoes concerns raised in a recent committee hearing](#) about the scientific rigour of Health Canada’s guidelines, the committee

also recommends Health Canada “conduct a comprehensive review of all existing literature relating to radio frequency fields and carcinogenicity based on international best practices.”

Health Canada should ensure the “openness and transparency of its processes” of this safety review, including “evidence considered or excluded,” the report emphasizes.

Ensuring “outside experts are provided full information when doing independent reviews, and that the scientific rationale for any change is clearly communicated,” should become a focus, the committee recommends.

The committee also suggests the Canadian Institutes of Health Research “consider funding research into the link between radio frequency fields and potential health effects such as cancer, genetic damage, infertility, impairment to development and behaviour, harmful effects to eyes and on the brain, cardiovascular, biological and biochemical effects.”

In addition, the federal government should “develop an awareness campaign relating to the safe use of wireless technologies, such as cellphones and Wi-Fi, in key environments such as the school and home” while considering “policy measures regarding the marketing of radiation-emitting devices

to children under the age of 14, in order to ensure they are aware of the health risks and how they can be avoided.”

Dr. Anthony Miller, a University of Toronto professor emeritus who served as scientific secretary on a [scientific review](#) completed in May 2011 by the World Health Organization’s International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), which concluded that cellphones and other wireless devices such as cordless phones and Wi-Fi transmitters are possibly — although not probably — carcinogenic said he was “very pleased with the outcome,” of the committee review.

“It will be interesting to see if Health Canada does anything,” added Miller, who argued while testifying before the committee that new research overlooked by Health Canada “reinforces the evidence that radio frequency fields are not just a possible human carcinogen, but a probable human carcinogen.”

Health Canada spokesman André Gagnon said “the Department thanks the committee members for their work and is currently reviewing the report. The Government of Canada will respond to the Committee’s report in due course.” — Paul Christopher Webster, Toronto, Ont.

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