



Children and Mobile Communications

Many parents allow their children to use mobile phones because of the recognised safety benefits of ready contact between parents and children. However, some parents also worry about whether there are potential risks particular to children and the recommendations by some authorities to limit use.

Background to the Concerns

In February 2005, research for the GSM Association showed that 1 in 3 parents provided their child with a mobile phone for personal safety reasons. The GSM Association understands that some parents are also be concerned about suggestions that children may be at particular risk due to their potential long lifetime usage and developing bodies. Current scientific evidence has not established a specific risk to children and to the best of our knowledge no government has placed mandatory restrictions on phone use by children. Some authorities have suggested that where parents are concerned they can take measures to reduce their children's exposure to radio signals from mobile phones and other radio devices.

The View of the World Health Organization

The World Health Organization (WHO) is coordinating an international programme to monitor scientific developments and advise governments on health policies in relation to exposure to radio frequency (RF) signals. In July 2005, the WHO stated:

'To date, all expert reviews on the health effects of exposure to RF fields have reached the same conclusion: There have been no adverse health consequences established from exposure to RF fields at levels below the international guidelines...'

The WHO goes on to say that the international guidelines incorporate large safety factors to protect all persons including children. Specifically in relation to mobile phone use the WHO advises that:

'Present scientific evidence does not indicate the need for any special precautions for the use of mobile phones. If individuals are concerned, they might choose to limit their own or their children's RF exposure by limiting the length of calls, or by using "hands-free" devices to keep mobile phones away from the head and body.'





Expert health groups in several countries support the WHO view.

How Children Use Mobile Phones

Social and market research in a number of countries shows that where children are provided with phones, the majority of their calls are to parents, are short and are for personal safety purposes. Many young people also prefer to use text messaging, which results in very low levels of exposure as the phone is handheld and the message transmission is of short duration.

Siting of Base Stations

Some communities have also been concerned about siting base stations near schools or kindergartens. It is important to understand that the signals from base stations are generally at similar levels to those from broadcast services, and in public areas are typically many thousands of times below the threshold for established health effects. Also, as base station antennas direct their energy outwards and not downwards, RF levels in nearby schools may actually be lower than in neighbouring areas.

The GSM Association Position

The current World Health Organization view is that international safety guidelines protect everyone in the population with a large safety factor and so there is no scientific basis to restrict children's use of phones or the locations of base stations. Mobile communications do provide important safety benefits for parents and children. The GSM Association supports parents making up their own mind about when and if their children should use mobile communication technologies.

Where to go for more information

GSM Association: <http://www.gsmworld.com/using/health/index.shtml>

World Health Organisation: <http://www.who.int/peh-emf/>

Health Council of the Netherlands: <http://www.gr.nl/>

Food and Drug Administration (USA): <http://www.fda.gov/cellphones/>

Health Protection Agency (UK): <http://www.hpa.org.uk/>

Agence Française de Sécurité Sanitaire Environnementale: <http://www.afsse.fr/>

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GSMA London Office: 1st Floor, Mid City Place, 71 High Holborn, London WC1V 6EA, United Kingdom • T +44 (0) 20 7759 2300

GSMA Dublin Office: Block 2, Deansgrange Business Park, Deansgrange, Co. Dublin, Ireland • T +353 (0) 1 289 1800

www.gsmworld.com