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Press Releases

Otis Brawley responds to IARC Classification of Cell Phones as Possible Carcinogenic

Below are comments from Otis W. Brawley, M.D., American Cancer Society chief medical officer, in response to the the WHO/International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classification of radiofrequency electromagnetic fields as possibly carcinogenic to humans (Group 2B).

"This report comes from a very credible group, and reaches reasonable conclusions about electromagnetic radiation from cellphones and other devices. It is critical that its findings be interpreted with great care. The working group reviewed a large number of studies and concluded that there was limited evidence that cell phones may cause glioma, a type of brain tumor that starts in the brain or spine. A 2B classification means that there could be some risk, but that the evidence is not strong enough to be considered causal, and needs to be investigated further. The bottom line is the evidence is enough to warrant concern, but it is not conclusive.

"The American Cancer Society does not independently judge the carcinogenicity of different exposures. Instead, we rely on IARC reviews of available evidence for our recommendations. At first glance, these new recommendations are very much in line with the American Cancer Society's current information that the evidence is limited, that further research is needed, and 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, particularly among 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. If some feel the potential risk outweighs the benefit, they can take actions, including limiting cell phone use, or using a headset. Limiting use among children also seems reasonable in light of this uncertainty. On the other hand, if someone is of the opinion that the absence of strong scientific evidence on the harms of cell phone use is reassuring, they may take different actions, and it would be hard to criticize that.

"It's also important to put this 2B classification into perspective. Many common exposures are classified in Category 2B, including gasoline exhaust and even coffee.

For more information, see: "[Cellular Phones](#)."

Also see [Dr. Len's Cancer Blog](#).