

Press Release

For immediate release

World's biggest study on cell phones & brain cancer inconclusive

CHUM Research Centre scientist produced results for Interphone International Study Group

Montreal, May 18, 2010 – The world's biggest investigation on possible links between cell phone use and brain tumours is inconclusive, according to a Canadian scientist who collaborated on the Interphone International Study Group. Jack Siemiatycki, an epidemiologist at the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal Research Centre (CRCHUM), and a professor at the University of Montreal, says restricted access to participants compromised the validity of results of the study to be published in the May 18 *International Journal of Epidemiology*. "The findings of the Interphone Study are ambiguous, surprising and puzzling," he says.

The Interphone International Study Group, which examined whether cellular radio frequencies could be correlated to brain tumours, was coordinated by the International Agency for Research on Cancer. The investigation was led by 21 epidemiologists from Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Over 10,000 people took part in the study: cell phone users; non cell phone users; cell phone users who survived brain cancer as well as brain cancer survivors who had never used cell phones.

Paradoxical findings

"If we combine all users and compare them with non-users, the Interphone Study found no increase in brain cancer among users. In fact, surprisingly, we found that when we combine users independently of the amount of use, they had lower brain cancer risks than non-users," says Dr. Siemiatycki. "However, the study also found heavy users of cell phones appeared to be at a higher risk of brain tumours than non-users."

Why the discrepancy? Simply put, scientists are unsure. Attention has focused on the methodology of the study and, in particular, on the representativeness of the study subjects who participated. With participation rates in the range of 50 percent to 60 percent of eligible subjects, it is possible that the participants did not provide an accurate portrait of cell phone usage among cancer cases and among healthy control subjects. Dr. Siemiatycki argues this problem arose because of constraints imposed on researchers by ethics committees intended to protect potential research subjects.

"Ethics reviews are now so rigid that scientists from Canada, the United States and Europe are losing the kind of access to medical databases and to study subjects that is needed to conduct studies such as this one. Ethics committees increasingly require that researchers work through treating physicians, professionals who are already overworked, to recruit their patients. This may work for clinical research exploring treatment of cancer, in which physicians often have a professional or personal interest, but it does not work for investigations into the causes of cancer. This flawed system can produce biased study results."

Despite the inconclusive results of the Interphone Study, consumers should not panic about possible risks related to cell phones, stresses Dr. Siemiatycki. "If there are risks, they are probably pretty small. Should anyone be concerned about potential dangers of cell phones, they can remedy the issue by using hands-free devices and avoid exposure to radio frequencies around their head."

Partners in research:

The Quebec portion of this study was supported by the government-funded Canadian Institutes of Health Research. Overall, the Interphone International Study Group received 19.2 million Euros (€) in funding of which 5.5 million € was contributed by industry sources.

About the study:

The Quebec portion of the investigation entitled, "Case-control study of cellular phone use and risk of tumors of the brain, parotid gland and acoustic nerve," was led by Jack Siemiatycki of the University of Montreal and Marie-Élise Parent of the INRS—Institut Armand-Frappier.

On the Web:

International Journal of Epidemiology: <http://ije.oxfordjournals.org>

International Agency for Research on Cancer: www.iarc.fr

CHUM Research Centre: www.chumtl.qc.ca/crchum.en.html

University of Montreal: www.umontreal.ca/english

INRS—Institut Armand-Frappier: www.iaf.inrs.ca

-30-

Source:

University of Montreal

To interview Jack Siemiatycki, please contact:

Nathalie Forgue

Communications Advisor

Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal

514 890-8000, ext. 15380

Pager: 514 801-5762

Sylvain-Jacques Desjardins

International press attaché

Université de Montréal

Telephone: 514-343-7593

Email: sylvain-jacques.desjardins@umontreal.ca

To obtain the Interphone Study, please contact:

Dr Nicolas Gaudin

Head, Communications Group

International Agency for Research on Cancer

Email: gaudin@iarc.fr

Telephone: 011-33-1-472-738-478