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[Home](#) › [News centre](#) › [National Press Releases](#) › [2011 Press Releases](#) › International Agency for Cancer Research Classification of Radiofrequency Electromagnetic Fields

 [Printer friendly page \(opens in new window\)](#)
[2013 Press Releases](#)[2012 Press Releases](#)» [2011 Press Releases](#)[2010 Press Releases](#)[2009 Press Releases](#)[2008 Press Releases](#)[2007 Press Releases](#)[2006 Press Releases](#)[Press Releases Archive](#)[NRPB Archive](#)[PHLS Archive](#)

## International Agency for Cancer Research Classification of Radiofrequency Electromagnetic Fields

**31 May 2011**

**The Health Protection Agency (HPA) notes the recent IARC classification of radio waves in Group 2B "possibly carcinogenic".**

Radio waves are very common in the environment and are used in radio and television broadcasts, wireless computer networks, pagers, radar, and cordless and mobile phones. This last use leads to a higher exposure than other uses and is the reason for the IARC review.

Other agents classified by IARC in Group 2B "possibly carcinogenic" are magnetic fields from electricity, coffee, petrol exhaust fumes and being a print worker.

The HPA notes the conclusion that there could be some risk and that a close watch should be kept for a link between mobile phones and cancer risk. HPA supports the call for additional research into the long-term, heavy use of mobile phones.

The HPA carries out research and continually reviews research on the health effects of radio waves. The IARC classification is consistent with previous reviews of the science and advice from HPA regarding the use of mobile phones.

HPA advice is that there is no clear scientific evidence of a cancer risk from exposure to radiofrequencies at levels below international guidelines but the possibility remains. The HPA has always advocated some precaution in the use of mobile phones in case there are long term effects which are presently unknown. Given the possibility of long term cancer effects, excessive use of mobile phones by children should be discouraged.

HPA advice on the use of wireless networks in schools and elsewhere is also consistent with this classification. Exposures from Wi-Fi equipment are much less than from mobile phones, and are well within international guidelines, so there is no reason why schools and others should not continue to use the technology.

An independent advisory group to HPA is reviewing all the evidence for possible health effects from radio waves published since 2003. It is due to publish its findings in 2012.

HPA's advice is consistent with published scientific evidence and with recommendations from bodies such as the EU Scientific Committee on Emerging and Newly Identified Health Risks, the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection and the World Health Organization.

**Notes for editors**


1. The International Agency for Research on Cancer is based in Lyon, France. The Agency's website is at <http://www.iarc.fr/>. Agents classified by IARC can be found at <http://monographs.iarc.fr/ENG/Classification/index.php>
2. Agents are selected for review by IARC on the basis of two main criteria: (a) there is evidence of human exposure and (b) there is some evidence or suspicion of carcinogenicity. The following topics are reviewed in depth; exposure data, studies of cancer in humans, studies of cancer in experimental animals and mechanistic and

other relevant data.

For more information on mobile phones visit

<http://www.hpa.org.uk/Topics/Radiation/UnderstandingRadiation/UnderstandingRadiation>

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