

Radiation fears prompt possible restrictions on wi-fi and mobile phone use in schools

Rory Watson

Brussels

The Council of Europe is recommending that restrictions be put in place on the use of mobile phones and access to the internet in all schools across the continent to protect young children from harmful radiation.

The recommendation is contained in a report on the potential dangers of electromagnetic fields and their effect on the environment drafted by Luxembourg Socialist MP Jean Huss and adopted as a resolution by the Council of Europe's parliamentary assembly on 27 May.

The parliamentarians said governments should "give preference to wired internet connections, and strictly regulate the use of mobile phones by schoolchildren on school premises" for children in general and particularly in schools and classrooms.

In addition, they are pressing for steps to be taken to reduce exposure to electromagnetic fields especially for children and young people "who seem to be most at risk from head tumours."

Mr Huss had originally called for a blanket ban on all mobile phones, DECT (Digital Enhanced Cordless Telecommunications) phones, wi-fi as well as WLAN (Wireless Local Area Network) systems in schools, which was supported by the parliamentary environment committee. He agreed, however, to water down his demands to win the widest possible backing among parliamentary colleagues.

"I tabled an amendment to my report and agreed to a compromise as some colleagues said it was going too far," said Mr Huss. "But I think we still have a very strong message on mobile phones. They should not be used in schools."

The Council of Europe recommendation has no legal force, but Mr Huss said he believed it sent a strong signal to the 47 member governments.

"They will now have to respond to our call," he added. "That will not be easy and will take time, but I think we have delivered a clear wake up call that they must take more precautionary and preventive measures to protect human health and the environment."

The report calls on governments to give more information and run awareness raising campaigns on the potentially harmful biological effects of electromagnetic fields targeting "children, teenagers and young people of reproductive age."

It also recommends that national authorities provide information on possible health risks from DECT type wireless telephones, baby monitors and other domestic appliances that emit continuous pulse waves if left permanently on standby and instead recommend the use of wired, fixed telephones.

Mr Huss suggested the issue could now be taken up by the European Parliament as well. Last year, both institutions cooperated closely in separate investigations into the H1N1 pandemic.

The full resolution is at <http://assembly.coe.int/Mainf.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta11/eRES1815.htm>.

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2011;342:d3428