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France set to turn off children's mobiles

Mobile phones may soon be banned from French schools as a health risk. France's senate this week voted to stop them being used in primary and middle schools. The revolutionary measure needs to be confirmed by the National Assembly, but President Sarkozy's government - which dominates it - has already backed a ban. The move follows mounting evidence that children who use the phones are at a particular risk of contracting cancer.

Their heads are smaller and their skulls are thinner than adults', allowing the radiation to penetrate deeper into the brain, while their nervous systems are still developing, making them more vulnerable.

Swedish research suggests that people who start using handsets before they reach 20 are five times more likely to get malignant gliomas, an incurable cancer of the brain. Some experts predict an "epidemic of brain cancers" among children as they grow up. Nine years ago a top level official committee under Sir William Stewart - a former government chief scientist - recommended that British children should be discouraged from using mobile phones.

Nothing was done, even though the committee repeated its advice in 2005. Now four out of every 10 primary school pupils have them.

Worse, a government quango, Becta - which promotes IT in schools - calls mobiles "very useful learning tools" and hails schools that encourage children to use them as "champions of change". Quelle horreur, as they say.