

## Cell phone health risks draw Specter's attention



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For decades Henry Lai, professor of Bioengineering, has been trying to identify the dangers, if any, posed by radiation from cell phones. When funding for the research dried up 10 years ago he turned his attention toward studying medical applications of electromagnetic fields, but the cell phone health questions remain.

Monday a subcommittee of the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee, led by Sen. Arlen Specter, D-Penn, heard testimony on health risks of cell phone use. Specter has been instrumental in increasing NIH cancer research funding and has been an advocate for cancer research.

With building safer cell phones back on the national radar, Lai is in the forefront advocating for more research funding by the National Institutes of Health. Lai believes there is cause for concern, but no proof of a connection between brain cancer and cell phone use. "At this point the biological research suggests that long-term use can have some adverse health effects, with brain cancer being one of those effects".

Lai, along with a number of international speakers, were in Washington, D.C. presenting articles and policy statements on cell phones and health at the Expert Conference on Cell Phones and Health: Science and Public Policy Questions on Sept. 13-15. On the day of Specter's hearing Lai presented "evidence for cancer-related effects" in a conference session with Leif Salford of Lund University, Sweden, who discussed "evidence for effects not related to cancer". Lai also was interviewed last week for NBC News and was quoted in several online news articles.

Cell phones emit much lower frequency radiation than X-rays, which are known to cause cancer. But the question is whether the lower frequency radiation can cause biological changes to humans. A current multinational research initiative called Interphone, has had mixed findings so far.

With 87 percent of the U.S. population owning a cell phone in 2008, according to CTIA, the international wireless trade association, and many of those being children and young adults, wanting to know what risks exist and how to mitigate them are lingering health questions.

Children may be at more risk than adults because their brains contain more fluid which enhances radiation conductivity, their skulls are thinner, and their nervous systems are not totally developed.

Lai does not oppose the use of cell phones, but wants to better understand the risks and help determine if phones can be made safer.

Public health officials in Finland advise parents to restrict cell phone use for children. Israel issued a similar parental warning. Some French legislators propose banning advertisements that encourage children under 12 to use cell phones. The US Food and Drug Administration recommends using hands-free devices and keeping cell-phone talk to a minimum, while the US Federal Communications Commission requires manufacturers to report the relative amount of radiation absorbed into the head by any given cell phone, or specific absorption rate.

To read more of Lai's comments and learn more about cell phone use and health, check out these recent articles:

[CNET: Researchers seek funds to study cell phone safety](#)

[Wired: Study reveals how much cell phone radiation your getting](#)

[MSNBC.com: Smoking vs cell phones](#)

[National Cancer Institute: Cellular telephone Use and cancer risk](#)

[CNET: Cell phone radiation levels](#)