

## France warns against excessive mobile phone use



By Brian Rohan

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The French Health Ministry on Wednesday issued a warning against excessive mobile phone use, especially by children, though it recognized science had not proved cellular technology was dangerous.

The appearance on the market of mobile phones designed for children has raised concern since youngsters would be particularly vulnerable to any possible health effects, the Ministry of Health, Youth and Sports said in a statement.

"As the hypothesis of a risk cannot be entirely excluded, precaution is justified," the ministry said.

It recommended using mobile phones in moderation, especially among children, and gave advice on how users could reduce their exposure to any possible risk.

"One should use a mobile phone with good judgment, avoid calling when reception is poor, or during high-speed travel, and finally, keep the telephone away from sensitive areas of the body by using a hands-free kit," the ministry said.

Health Minister Roselyne Bachelot-Narquin said on France 2 television that mobile phones given to children could be useful safety items, but parents should be cautious about frequent use.

"Today, here and now, it does not appear useful to completely do away with, or ban, mobile phones for children ... but in keeping with the principle of caution, I want to inform parents completely," she said.

A November 2006 report from the World Health Organization (WHO) said available evidence suggests long-term exposure to radio-frequency and microwave radiation from mobile phones had no adverse health effects.

However, the WHO said other studies pointed to an increased risk of tumors in people who have used an analogue mobile phone for more than 10 years.

A British study released in September 2007 said mobile phones did not pose short-term health risks, but scientists noted that studies to date included few participants who had used mobile phones for longer than ten years -- the time many cancers take to appear.

The head of France's AFSSET, an independent but state-funded health watchdog, said parents should not give small children mobile telephones.

"Since they aren't capable of limiting their use of the telephone, parents should not buy them mobile phones," Michele Froment-Vedrine told Reuters.

As of September 30, there were more than 53 million mobile users in France, about 84 percent of the population, according to the French telecoms regulator Arcep.

At Orange, France's largest mobile phone operator, no-one was available for comment.

(Additional reporting by Astrid Wendlandt; Editing by Janet Lawrence)