

For: Heads of all Establishments/Settings  
OCC Managers  
Governors/Management Committees  
Trade Union Safety Representatives  
Employee Notice Boards  
Intranet



## Mobile Phones and Base Stations – Health Advice

### Introduction

Mobile phones are now part of our way of life at work and home. They can have benefits for safety, efficiency, effectiveness and convenience for employers and employees.

This guidance document will provide you with information and advice on using a mobile phone, base stations and where you can find independent advice.

### Scope

This guidance is aimed at all individuals who use mobile phones for work and leisure.

### How do mobile phones work?

When you make a call on a mobile phone, the phone transmits radio waves to the antenna of a nearby base station. The base station then transmits the call using the mobile telecommunications network to the phone of the person you are calling. In towns or cities, where there are many phone users, more base stations are located than in the countryside. The antennas of base stations may be mounted on masts, buildings or other structures.

### How safe are base stations and mobile phones?

Radio waves from base stations in this country comply with international health and safety guidelines. The levels of radio waves emitted from base stations in places where the public have access are generally found to be hundreds or thousands of times below the health and safety guideline limits. And, although the levels of radio waves from mobile phones are higher than from base stations, all mobile phones comply with international and UK health and safety guidelines.

### What does the science say about safety?

Research focusing on mobile telephony over the last ten years has shown no convincing evidence that the radio signals from mobile phones and base stations cause adverse health effects (refer to World Health Organization (WHO) [website](#)).

In the UK, the Health Protection Agency (HPA) closely monitors all mobile phone and health research. Apart from an accident risk when using a phone while driving, it states,

Issued by the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team, Customer Services, Unipart House, Garsington Road, OXFORD, OX4 2GQ

*'...there is no clear evidence of adverse health effects from the use of mobile phones or from phone masts.'* However, as people have only been using mobile phones for relatively few years, the HPA advises that more research be carried out, especially to investigate whether there might be longer term effects.

### **Is it possible to get too close to base stations and their antennas?**

Radio waves get weaker as you get further away from antennas. Many different structures are used to host base stations and measures are always put in place to ensure a safe distance between the public and the antennas.

### **Do radio waves cause cancer?**

The UK Mobile Telecommunications and Health Research programme reported in 2007 that no association was found between mobile phone use of less than ten years and cancers of the brain and nervous system. However, as the situation for long-term exposures is less clear, the HPA continues to monitor the scientific evidence.

### **What about mobile phones heating up the brain?**

Any increase in brain temperature that may occur from using a mobile phone close to the head is very small, well within the normal body heating from everyday activities such as exercise and is not considered by the WHO to be harmful to health.

### **Best advice when using a mobile phone?**

There is no immediate need for concern when using mobile phones or having a base station in your area. This is because, despite much research, there is no convincing evidence that either will cause harm. However, we have only been using mobile phones widely for the last decade or so and we need more research to look at the situation, particularly in the long term.

The body and nervous system are still developing into the teenage years. Therefore, as a precaution, the UK Chief Medical Officers advise that children and young people under 16 should be encouraged to use mobile phones for essential purposes only, and to keep calls short.

If you are concerned, you can take steps to reduce your exposure such as using hands free kits or texting.

To see the evidence available so far, visit the websites provided in the 'Further Information' section at the bottom of this guidance.

### **Managers Responsibilities**

The HSE advises employers to discourage the use of mobile phones while driving, even when using hands-free devices, or using them where safety is important.

OCC does not permit using your phone whilst driving.

If you are an employer, you can be prosecuted if you ask your employees to make or receive calls while driving.

## Employees Responsibilities

### Driving

It is illegal to drive a vehicle or ride a motorcycle while using a hand-held mobile phone. This also applies to any similar device (that must be held at some point) to:

- Send or receive spoken or written messages or still or moving images
- Access the internet

These devices include Smartphones or Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs). While driving, you must not use your hand-held mobile phone, smartphone or PDA:

- to make or receive calls;
- to send or receive picture and text messages;
- to access the internet;
- when you are stopped at traffic lights; or
- when you are queuing in traffic.

It is also illegal to use a hand-held phone when supervising a learner driver or rider.

### When you can use a hand-held mobile phone in your vehicle

You should only use your mobile phone in a vehicle if you:

- need to call 999 or 112 in response to a genuine emergency where it is unsafe or impracticable to stop;
- are safely parked (but never stop on the hard shoulder of the motorway unless it is an emergency);
- are a passenger.

### Using hands-free phones, sat-navs and two-way radios when driving

It is not illegal to use hands-free phones, satellite navigation systems (sat-navs) and two-way radios while driving, but they can be a distraction. You will face the same penalties as using a phone if the police believe you are not in proper control of your vehicle.

### If you call someone when they are driving

If you call someone and they are driving, arrange to speak later and hang up. If you keep talking, you are putting them at risk of an accident and encouraging them to break the law.

### For further information and advice:

This guidance was written using advice from:

- The Department of Health's guidance on [Mobile Phones and Base Stations 2011](#)
- Directgov [Mobile Phones and Driving](#)

	email and web addresses	
<b>Specialist:</b>		
World Health Organisation (WHO)	<a href="http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs193/en/index.html">www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs193/en/index.html</a>	
Health Protection	<a href="http://www.hpa.org.uk">www.hpa.org.uk</a> (type 'mobile telephony and health' into the search bar)	

Agency (HPA)		
Directgov	<a href="http://www.direct.gov.uk">www.direct.gov.uk</a> (Mobile Phones and Driving)	
Ofcom	Ofcom Sitefinder website about base station emissions - <a href="http://www.sitefinder.ofcom.org.uk">www.sitefinder.ofcom.org.uk</a>	
<b>General:</b>		
Health, Safety & Wellbeing Team	<b>email:</b> <a href="mailto:healthandsafetyhelp@oxfordshire.gov.uk">healthandsafetyhelp@oxfordshire.gov.uk</a> <b>web address:</b> <a href="http://intranet.oxfordshire.gov.uk/links/intranet/healthandsafety">http://intranet.oxfordshire.gov.uk/links/intranet/healthandsafety</a>	Helpdesk 01865 797222