

Head of cancer institute warns of cell-phone use

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PITTSBURGH — The head of a prominent cancer research institute issued an unprecedented warning to his faculty and staff yesterday: Limit cell-phone use because of the possible risk of cancer.

The warning from Dr. Ronald B. Herberman, director of the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute, is contrary to numerous studies that don't find a link between increased tumors and cell phone use, and a public lack of worry by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Herberman is basing his alarm on early, unpublished data. He says it takes too long

to get answers from science and he believes people should take action now — especially when it comes to children.

“Really at the heart of my concern is that we shouldn't wait for a definitive study to come out, but err on the side of being safe rather than sorry later,” Herberman said.

In the memo he sent to about 3,000 faculty and staff yesterday, he says children should use cell phones only for emergencies because their brains are still developing.

Adults should keep the phone away from the head and use the speakerphone or a wireless headset, he says. He even warns against using cell phones in public places like a bus because it exposes others to the phone's elec-

tromagnetic fields.

The issue that concerns some scientists — though nowhere near a consensus — is electromagnetic radiation, especially its possible effects on children. It is not a major topic in conferences of brain specialists.

A 2008 University of Utah analysis looked at nine studies — including some Herberman cites — with thousands of brain tumor patients and concludes “we found no overall increased risk of brain tumors among cellular phone users. The potential elevated risk of brain tumors after long-term cellular phone use awaits confirmation by future studies.”

Studies last year in France and Norway concluded the same thing.