

Children being used as 'guinea pigs' in mass Wi-Fi experiment, warn teachers

par LAURA CLARK

2 August 2007

The use of wireless computer networks in classrooms should be immediately suspended until an inquiry has fully investigated the health threat to millions of pupils, a teachers' chief urged yesterday.

Philip Parkin, the General Secretary of the Professional Association of Teachers, said that children were effectively acting as guinea pigs because the risk posed by 'wi-fi' networks had not yet been thoroughly considered.

He said scientific evidence prompted him to question the safety of the systems already introduced in 15,000 schools across the UK.

Wireless technology has been linked with loss of concentration, fatigue, reduced memory and headaches. There are also claims that it could increase the long-term risk of cancer.

Addressing the PAT's annual conference in Harrogate, Mr Parkin said: "My real concern is that until there is a full inquiry based on both existing evidence and on newly commissioned research work, the nation's children are being treated as guinea pigs in a large-scale experiment."

Mr Parkin's demand for an inquiry follows a similar call from Britain's top health watchdog, the chairman of the Health Protection Agency.

Sir William Stewart said in May that a review of the health effects of wi-fi networks was 'timely' amid fears they could pose greater dangers than previously thought.

Wi-fi systems use high frequency radio waves to transmit and receive data over distances of several hundred feet



Teachers have warned that not enough is known about the effects of wi-fi



Alan Johnson is said to believe that no investigation is required into the effects of wi-fi

They allow users to surf the internet within range of a wireless transmitter and remove the need to connect via a cable.

Some 70 per cent of primary schools and 81 per cent of secondaries have already introduced wi-fi, according to official figures, and it is being fitted as standard in all new state schools, including academies.

A typical comprehensive has ten wi-fi transmitters spread around the premises. If a school has thick walls, there may be many more. Children are thought to be more vulnerable to electro-magnetic radiation due to their thinner skulls and still-developing nervous systems.

A recent [BBC 1 Panorama \(vidéo HD\)](#) programme claimed a wi-fi network in a Norwich comprehensive gave off three times as much radiation as a typical phone mast, though some scientists have queried the programme's claims.

Guidance circulated to PAT members calls on schools to dismantle wi-fi networks immediately and replace them with cables. If this is impossible, they should measure radiation levels around the school and put warning signs at hotspots.

The PAT is urging the Government to revise advice to schools which says wi-fi networks pose "no appreciable risk to children or others in schools".

Mr Parkin has given his 35,000-strong union an advice document compiled by a PAT member who suffered a violent reaction after wi-fi was introduced at his public school.

Michael Bevington, a classics teacher at Stowe School, became too ill to teach after suffering headaches, pains, flushes, pressure behind the eyes and nausea. He has since conducted a study of research into electro-magnetic radiation and believes official advice on wi-fi is "inaccurate".

Earlier this year, Professor Lawrie Challis, chairman of a Government-sponsored telecommunications research programme, warned of the dangers of children using wi-fi-enabled laptops on their knees, when the wi-fi transmitter would be only 2cm from the child's body.

Despite its chairman's call, the Health Protection Agency considers there to be "no consistent evidence of health effects from wi-fi".

Last night Children's Minister Kevin Brennan insisted that wi-fi was safe. He said: "The Health Protection Agency has consistently advised that it does not consider there to be a problem with the safety of wi-fi.

"It is widely used in homes, offices and in public areas."