



What you should know

Many children now have access to cell-phone technology and many parents use cell-phones as their main method of monitoring their movements and ensuring their safety. Cell-phones also provide an immediate means of communication in case of medical or family emergencies. There are, however, several risks inherent in the use of cell-phones by children.

The risk of exposure to electromagnetic radiation

Cell-phones emit radiofrequency (RF) energy, which is a form of electromagnetic radiation. The rate at which this is absorbed by the body is indicated by the Specific Energy Absorption Rate (SAR value). An average cell-phone has a SAR value of 1.6w/kg; some have a value as high as 2.0w/kg, which is the recommended maximum SAR value. To limit their children's exposure to radiation, parents are advised to: LIMIT their children's use of cell-phones as much as possible and encourage them to use landlines whenever possible and choose a cell-phone with the lowest SAR value.

The financial implications of cell-phone use by children

To protect themselves against heavy financial costs, parents are advised to contact their Service Provider and ask for information and advice on: the relative benefits of 'pre-paid' tariff plans compared to 'post-paid' plans (monthly billing); any preferential rates on offer; the cost of 'Premium Rate Services' and international dialing; and how any or all of these services can be barred from their children's phone.

Emergency calls – 999 or 112

Parents should demonstrate to their children how emergency calls can be made by dialing 999 or 112 and that calls to these numbers can be made regardless of whether or not the phone has airtime, is locked, or has its SIM card removed.

Other risks

Children can use cell-phones to **bully or intimidate** other children – either by calls, texts or the sending of unpleasant photo-images. Photo-images or video footage can also be accessed or sent by those with **fraudulent, illegal or sexually-deviant intentions**. Cell-phones also offer children **unlimited access to commercial content** via sales texts, 'spam' or other means. They also offer **unsupervised communication** between the sexes. Cell-phones can enable children to access the Internet where they can find sexually explicit information or information that can induce them to violence, fraud or other socially undesirable practices. Children can also visit 'Chat Rooms' where they can come into contact with ill-intentioned adults or children.

Children can become 'addicted to' or **dependent upon cell-phones**.

Cell-phones pose a security threat – in that they invite theft, which occasionally culminate in violent robberies. They are also easily lost.

To prevent stolen or lost phones being used by third parties: key in: ***#06#** to obtain the 15-digit **International Mobile Equipment Identity (IMEI number)**, keep this safe and use it when contacting the Service Provider to bar the phone from future use.

'Bluetooth-enabled' phones can expose children to the risk of receiving unsolicited messages from other users, or direct access to personal information/images stored on their phones. To avoid this: disable the 'Bluetooth application' on the phone.