

Health impacts of mobile phone use to be explored in huge new study

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The Imperial team aims to recruit 100,000 mobile phone users to the COSMOS study

(PhysOrg.com) -- A new decades-long study launches today to investigate whether there is a link between the use of mobile phones and long-term health problems such as cancer.

The [cohort study](#) on mobile communications (COSMOS) forms part of the Mobile Telecommunications and Health Research (MTHR) Programme. The international study will run for 20-30 years and will follow the health of at least 250,000 participants aged 18-69 in five European countries. The UK arm of COSMOS is being led by a research team from Imperial College London.

There are currently over six billion mobile phone devices in use

worldwide, with over 70 million in use in the UK, which has a population of 61 million people.

Studies of short term use of mobile phones and health have been reassuring, other than well known associations with risk of motor accidents. However, there are still some uncertainties about the health effects of mobile phone use, since some diseases take many years to develop and so far few people have been using mobile phones for that period of time.

Dr Mireille Toledano, co-Principal Investigator of the study from the School of Public Health at Imperial College London, said: "For the benefit of current users and for future generations, it is important for us to carry out long-term health monitoring of a large group of mobile phone users so that we can identify if there are any possible health effects from this new and widespread technology that has become so central to our everyday lives."

Professor Paul Elliott, Principal Investigator of the study from the School of Public Health at Imperial College London, said: "Scientists have been looking at the effects of mobile phones on health for several years and so far, reviews of the research have been reassuring with respect to mobile phone use and [health problems](#) in the short term. However, as mobile phones have only been in widespread use for a relatively short time, we haven't been able to carry out long-term studies until now.

"COSMOS aims to fill in important gaps in our knowledge of mobile phones and health. By looking at large numbers of people across Europe over a long period of time, we should be able to build up a valuable picture of whether or not there is any link between mobile phone use and health problems over the long term," added Professor Elliott.

Through four major mobile phone operators, the COSMOS project team from Imperial College London is inviting 2.4 million [mobile phone users](#) in the UK to take part in the study.

"We can only do this study and find out whether mobile phones are affecting our health in the long term with the help of the public willing to take part. Through contributing a small amount of time to this study, participants will make a big difference to our understanding of mobile phones and health. Anyone who wants to find out more and get in touch with us can visit our website at www.ukcosmos.org," said Dr Toledano.

Participants who agree to take part in the study will complete an on-line questionnaire about their mobile phone use, health and lifestyle. The researchers will monitor participants' mobile phone use and any health problems they might develop, e.g., cancers and neurological diseases such as Alzheimer's disease, for at least the next 20 years. They will also analyse whether any changes in the frequency of symptoms, such as headaches and sleep disorders, are related to mobile phone usage.

"Over the past decade, mobile phones have become a normal part of everyday life for the majority of people in Britain. The COSMOS study is the largest research study worldwide investigating mobile phone use and health and is a very important step towards finding out whether there are health implications of using a mobile phone over a long period of time," said Dr Toledano.

Professor Lawrie Challis from the MTHR Programme Management Committee said "We still cannot rule out the possibility that [mobile phone](#) use causes cancer. The balance of present evidence does not suggest it does but we need to be sure. The best way of doing this is through a large cohort study such as COSMOS and I am very pleased that the UK is to play an important part in this international endeavour."

The study follows on from successful pilot studies carried out between 2004-2008 during the first phase of the MTHR Programme.

Provided by Imperial College London

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