

[REDACTED]

Ref: H201807843

Dear [REDACTED]

Response to your request for official information

I refer to your request of 6 November 2018 under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), transferred to the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) from the Office of Hon Dr David Clark for:

*“Has the Health Department done, or is undertaking, a study on cellphone link to cancer, particularly brain cancer?
Does your department keep a record of the number of people who have developed brain cancer in New Zealand, & if so, how many have developed brain cancer over the last ten years & are the numbers increasing?”*

The information held by the Ministry relating to this request is itemised below.

Has the Health Department done, or is undertaking, a study on cellphone link to cancer, particularly brain cancer?

The Ministry has not funded any studies to ascertain whether mobile phone use increases the risk of brain cancer. However, The University of Auckland, funded by the Health Research Council of New Zealand (HRCNZ), has participated in an international study called “The INTERPHONE Study”. This study was conducted by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) in 2000, which aimed to look into the development rate of brain tumours in cellphone users.

In May 2010, the study’s results were published in the International Journal of Epidemiology. Overall, the results indicated that mobile phone use did not increase the risk of developing brain tumours, however, further studies were recommended. Further information relating to this research, as well as other health risks associated with mobile phone use is available on the Ministry’s website: <https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/healthy-living/environmental-health/household-items-and-electronics/cellphones>.

Additionally, a similar study in New Zealand was conducted by The University of Auckland (Kim et al. 2015). The study concluded that there has been no consistent increase in incidence rates of primary brain cancers attributable to mobile phone use. You can find the abstract of this paper at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25715883>. Please note that this study was not funded by either the Ministry or the HRCNZ, but may be of interest to you.

Does your department keep a record of the number of people who have developed brain cancer in New Zealand, and if so, how many have developed brain cancer over the last ten years & are the numbers increasing?

Yes, the Cancer Registry records the incidence of brain cancer. You can find this information publicly available from: <https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/cancer-historical-summary-1948-2015>. Please note that it takes several years for data to be finalised as cancer

registrations come from three major sources: laboratory reports, hospitalisations, and death registrations. There are also a variety of data quality processes that need to be performed before the data is published, which typically takes around 20 months. As such, only figures up to 2015 are currently available. The 2016 data is expected to be published in December 2018.

The age-standardised rate for brain cancer varies but this appears to have decreased since the 1980/1990s.

I trust this information fulfils your request.

Please note this response (with your personal details removed) may be published on the Ministry of Health website.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'William Rainger', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dr William Rainger
Deputy Director-General
Population Health and Prevention