



The Truth Behind 4 HAZARDOUS HEALTH CLAIMS

With the constant stream of scary health news, **IT CAN BE HARD TO DISCERN FACTS FROM SENSATIONALISM.** Below, we demystify four “hazardous” claims, so you can brush off the myths and concentrate on the truth. *By Dorkys Ramos*

THE CLAIM: CELL PHONES CAUSE BRAIN TUMORS.

Cell phones give off a small amount of radio frequency (RF) energy (in the same range as microwaves), but studies have failed to show a connection between exposure and any biological changes; the National Cancer Institute states that despite the increase in cell phone use, brain cancer occurrences did not rise between 1987 and 2005. If the level of RF energy emitted by phones were higher, it would raise body temperature and burn tissue, but newer models with lower emissions and the growing popularity of texting have also diminished concerns. However, the Food and Drug Administration suggests reducing time spent on your cell and using a headset or speaker mode to cut down on your RF exposure.

THE VERDICT: *False.*

THE CLAIM: CHILDHOOD IMMUNIZATIONS CAUSE AUTISM.

Autism affects approximately 24,000 children every year, including about 1 in 170 Hispanic children. Children are often diagnosed with autism around the same time they are vaccinated or have symptoms triggered by the shots, leading some parents to believe that immunizations cause the developmental disorder. The refusal to immunize children has led to recent outbreaks in preventable diseases, like measles and pertussis (whooping cough), which can be fatal to children. No studies have been able to find a connection between vaccinations and autism, and the benefits of being vaccinated far outweigh the risks. Also, a study often cited by anti-immunization proponents was exposed last year as fraudulent.

THE VERDICT: *False.*

THE CLAIM: BPA IN CANS AND PLASTIC IS HARMFUL.

Concerns have been raised about the potential effects on fetuses and children of ingesting foods containing low doses of Bisphenol A (BPA), a chemical used to manufacture hard-plastic containers like baby bottles and reusable cups as well as the inner lining of metal cans. Research to discover BPA's effects on the brain, prostate gland and behavioral development is ongoing. Meanwhile, the Food and Drug Administration has asked the manufacturing industry to stop production of BPA-containing baby bottles and formula cans and minimize levels in food-can linings. Moms should opt for glass and polypropylene bottles and disposable plastic bag liners or breast-feed when possible, though the consensus remains that baby formula provides nutrition that outweighs any risks.

THE VERDICT: *The jury is still out.*

THE CLAIM: WORKING THE OVERNIGHT SHIFT LEADS TO CANCER.

About five percent of American adults work in the evening, with another four percent permanently clocking in during the overnight hours. Research suggests that disrupting your body's internal clock and the production of the tumor-suppressing hormone melatonin over the long term by working nights could promote cancer. But scientists are still trying to pinpoint the exact reason behind this correlation, while recent studies state that more modern rotating schedules may not be as harmful as the extreme ones of the past, when employees worked overnight indefinitely.

THE VERDICT: *The jury is still out.*