

Cell Phones, Cancer, and Coronavirus: Tucker Carlson Spreads Conspiracy Theories



By Alex Berezow, PhD — February 20, 2020

The Fox News host says cell phones cause cancer and the Wuhan coronavirus (COVID-19) might have escaped from a biological weapons lab. Both claims are ridiculous.



Credit: Gage Skidmore/Wikipedia [1]

Fox News's Tucker Carlson doesn't know much about science, technology, or public health, but he definitely has an opinion about them. And he knows a conspiracy when he sees one.

The other night, he did a segment in which he claimed that cell phones cause cancer. They do not. This conclusion is considered the consensus and is upheld by most health and regulatory agencies.

Before we analyze his segment, let's get one thing straight: Cancer has been linked to absolutely everything. [RealClearScience](#) [2] put together what is certainly not an exhaustive list: Red meat, baby powder, wine, Facebook (yes, really), brushing your teeth poorly, modern life, and much more. Most of this research is dubious, and the subfield that examines cell phones and cancer is especially dubious. There's probably more bad research than good research, and a motivated person can find a study to back up any viewpoint.

That's why we have to defer to people whose entire job is to review mountains of data and make decisions. Usually, those are government scientists and officials. They don't always get it right (and we criticize them when that's the case), but they often times do. This is one of those cases.

Cell Phones Do Not Cause Cancer

Now, the Tucker Carlson [segment](#) [3]. He begins by saying:

The National Toxicology Program, a government organization, found that, "High exposure to radiofrequency radiation used by cell phones was associated with clear evidence... of tumors in rats."

That's true. However, the same organization also [said](#) [4], "[T]he exposure levels and durations in our studies were greater than what people experience." That means the results cannot be translated directly to humans. Tucker left that part out. He goes on:

In 2012, Italy's Supreme Court upheld a ruling that said there was a link between a business executive's brain tumor and his heavy use of a mobile phone.

So what? That's not evidence of anything. An Italian court once sentenced six seismologists to prison for manslaughter [because they didn't predict an earthquake correctly](#) [5]. American courts have declared that baby powder causes cancer. As a matter of routine, the legal system makes a complete mockery of science. Tucker then invokes conspiracy:

Our trusty FCC though says there's nothing to worry about. According to our federal agencies, smartphones are entirely safe.

For whatever reason, Tucker thinks the FCC is lying. Fine. The [National Cancer Institute](#) [6] also rejects a link between cell phones and cancer. (It also provides a nice critique of the study cited by Tucker.) The [FDA](#) [7] also rejects a link. The [CDC](#) [8] is skeptical.

If you don't trust any government agency, then the [American Cancer Society](#) [9] expresses doubts about a link between cell phones and cancer. If you don't trust anything American, [Cancer Research UK](#) [10] also says cell phones don't cause cancer. If you don't trust the British, the [European Union](#) [11] does what they do -- which is to provide a mealy-mouthed report that doesn't say anything useful. If you don't trust the Europeans (and on science, you really shouldn't), the [World Health Organization](#) [12] is skeptical of a cell phone-cancer link.

Did Tucker mention any of that? Of course not. Instead, he compared our usage of cell phones to those tobacco ads that featured doctors smoking cigarettes.

The Wuhan Coronavirus Is Not a Bioweapon

Tucker then one-upped himself. He did another [segment](#) ^[13] in which Bill Gertz, a *Washington Times* national security correspondent, hints that the Wuhan coronavirus (COVID-19) might be a biological weapon. "Is it human-caused, or laboratory-caused, or is it a natural phenomena?... Let's get the debate going."



Could coronavirus be linked to China's biowarfare program?

Feb. 19, 2020 - 3:21 - Reaction and analysis from Washington Times columnist Bill Gertz.

For video troubleshooting and help click here.

Okay, let's do that. The most likely explanation is natural phenomenon because Chinese markets allow potentially millions of humans to interact with potentially millions of live animals. That's a recipe for disaster. SARS jumped from animals to humans in China in 2002 precisely for that reason.

Tucker then asks bluntly, "Is there any evidence as of tonight that this virus originated in a lab?"

The answer to that is "no," but the guest said, "I don't know." He then mentioned that China's only high-security biological lab is located in Wuhan. With the chyron asking about China's "biowarfare program," the clear implication is that Tucker and his guest are suggesting that the Wuhan coronavirus is actually a leaked biological weapon. But, there is zero reason to believe that because it is entirely conjecture. The Wuhan lab, which is similar to the ones at the CDC, is a research facility where dangerous microbes are studied, not weaponized.

There are several other basic points to consider: (1) If China did accidentally release a virus to use as a bioweapon, it would probably be capable of killing more than 2% of those it infected. (2) Why create a bioweapon that is essentially a really bad cold when there are so many "better" options (e.g., plague or smallpox)? (3) The genome of the virus was sequenced and released to the public, which would be a very strange thing to do if the virus was actually a weapon. Why would the Chinese government hand over the recipe?

Tucker certainly can opine and espouse conspiracy theories, but to do so from such a public platform is somewhat reckless. He would be more persuasive if his speculation was grounded in scientific facts.

Additionally, nonsense has consequences. The Hong Kong-based [South China Morning Post](#) ^[14] reports that the conspiracy theories are hurting the Wuhan lab's ability to research the new coronavirus.

Tucker Carlson, Conspiracy Theorist

Back in October, Tucker ran a [segment](#) ^[15] about evidence for UFOs. Maybe they brought the coronavirus?

COPYRIGHT © 1978-2016 BY THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON SCIENCE AND HEALTH

Source URL: <https://www.acsh.org/news/2020/02/20/cell-phones-cancer-and-coronavirus-tucker-carlson-spreads-conspiracy-theories-14584>

Links

- [1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tucker_Carlson#/media/File:Tucker_Carlson_by_Gage_Skidmore_3.jpg
- [2] <https://www.realclearscience.com/blog/2013/04/everything-causes-cancer.html>
- [3] <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=250491082613832>
- [4] <https://factor.niehs.nih.gov/2018/11/feature/1-feature-radiation/index.htm>
- [5] <https://www.nature.com/news/italian-court-finds-seismologists-guilty-of-manslaughter-1.11640>
- [6] <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/radiation/cell-phones-fact-sheet>
- [7] <https://www.fda.gov/radiation-emitting-products/cell-phones/scientific-evidence-cell-phone-safety>
- [8] https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/radiation/cell_phones._FAQ.html
- [9] <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/radiation-exposure/cellular-phones.html>
- [10] <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/causes-of-cancer/cancer-controversies/do-mobile-phones-cause-cancer>
- [11] [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635598/EPRS_BRI\(2019\)635598_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635598/EPRS_BRI(2019)635598_EN.pdf)
- [12] <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/noncommunicable-diseases/cancer/publications/pre-2009/what-effects-do-mobile-phones-have-on-peoples-health>
- [13] https://video.foxnews.com/v/6133959748001?playlist_id=5198073478001#sp=show-clips
- [14] <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/3051640/chinese-research-lab-badly-hurt-rumours-linking-it-man-made>
- [15] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z7-DhPCG_II