

## Students test cell phones for dangers

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The Eisenhower High School students in Ray Stadt's integrated science class are out to answer one question: Do cell phones fry your brain?

"I think so," 15-year-old Jazmine Gladney said. "At least a little bit."



*Voyd Neely, 17, of Blue Island, and other students at Eisenhower High School work on a computer lab exercise measuring radiation emitted from cellular phones.*

About 60 students, huddled over computers and biting their nails in anticipation, punched in numbers to test the strength of radiation - strontium-90, a byproduct of nuclear energy, to be exact - at various distances. The spans simulate holding a cell phone to an ear, using a wireless headset or a wired headset.

With each stroke of a key, the students in the computer lab in Blue Island used a live remote link to control an actual radiation counter at the University of Queensland, Australia.

"I studied rocks last year. That wasn't very interesting," 15-year-old sophomore Ryan Grand said. "This is pretty cool."

The possibility that Grand's sleek, black LG slider emitted radiation never crossed his mind.

But then again, he only talks on it once or twice a day.

He sends texts, which carry less radiation risks, about 200 times a day.

About what exactly?

"What we talk about," he answered in a matter-of-fact-almost-confused kind of way.

Since Stadt had the students listen to a podcast on cell phones and radiation, Justin Geiter has spent less and less time on the phone.



"I usually just talk to my girlfriend," the 15-year-old sophomore from Blue Island said. "So now I just text pretty much all day. I don't want to get a tumor."

Either does Gladney, the cheerleader who said she sends and receives thousands of texts a day.

"I'm constantly on my phone. I never get off it," the Blue Island teen said. "Sometimes my head hurts."

Her solution?

"I'll either switch ears or put it on speaker - as long as there are no nosy people around."

The purpose of the Radioactivity iLab isn't as much about cell phones and radiation - a hot topic that the jury still is out on - as it is about the scientific method.

Cell phones just provided the perfect hook.

"Everybody has one now," said Stadt, of Frankfort Square. "Any time we can find something to connect to real life, it's so much more meaningful for the kids."



The online labs, iLabs, are the brainchild of Northwestern University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology thanks to a \$1 million grant from the National Science Foundation. Kemi Jona, director of the Office of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Education Partnerships at Northwestern, led the way in making the high-end university resources available to high school kids.

"This makes it accessible to all students, regardless of if they're in a rich suburban school or an inner-city school," Jona said. "It levels the playing field for improving science education for all students."

Northwestern selected Stadt as one of 23 teachers in the nation - the only one in the Southland - to partake in the pilot.

Seeing the effect of radiation firsthand was a bit of a silver lining for Alsip 15-year-old Haley Beukema, whose mom took away her phone for going over her minutes and texts two months ago.

"I'll never be on the phone as much when I get my phone back," she said.