Russian Misinformation Campaign Links 5G Internet to Cancer

RT America has been exaggerating the health hazards of new high-speed cell phone signals, spreading fear about U.S. tech.

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This week in internet cancer myths: Russian news agency RT America has declared a "5G apocalypse"—nefariously linking new high-speed cell phone signals to cancer, autism and other serious health concerns. A recent report in The New York times debunks the dangerous myth.

As the Times reports, RT America aired its first program claiming that 5G was harmful to human health in May 2018. Since then, it has run seven segments linking the new network to brain cancer, infertility, autism, heart tumors, Alzheimer's disease, learning disabilities and more.

RT America—the same outlet identified by U.S. intelligence as a key meddler in the 2016 presidential election—runs its programs through cable, satellite and online streaming platforms and shares individual stories on Facebook and YouTube. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence has referred to the television network as "the Kremlin's principal international propaganda outlet."

To be clear: The radio waves used for 5G internet are not linked to cancer. All cell phones use radio waves to receive and transmit signals no matter the speed, and plenty of studies have scrutinized wireless technology for potential health risks and have found little evidence to back health concerns. So why is Russia peddling lies about the new U.S. technology?

According to experts consulted by the Times, whichever nation dominates 5G internet will likely gain a competitive edge for much of the next hundred years. By undermining a new world of hyper-connected (and politically/economically advantageous) technologies, Russia could be trying to delay the rollout of the technology by a Western democratic governments.

Still, hundreds of blogs and websites across the United States appear to be sharing RT's misinformation without citing its original Russian source. The reports often claim that 5G technology's high frequencies will render new phones and cell towers incredibly harmful to human health.

But scientists say the opposite is true. The higher the radio frequency, the less it is able to

penetrate human skin, likely limiting our overall exposure to signals over time. And although a federal study last year showed that 2G signals could produce brain cancer in male rats when received in high doses, officials have dismissed any link to humans, explaining that we are exposed in much smaller doses.

To learn more about the ongoing research around cancer and wireless technology, click here.

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