

Is Wireless Internet Safe for Our School Kids?

Along with the rest of the world, Vermont schools are struggling to cope with the CoVid-19 lockdown, causing a massive shift to online classrooms and creating a frantic push for internet access. Tragically, with unemployment, lack of health care and homelessness still unresolved, providing educational resources to kids during this time is simply out of reach to many. And despite widespread agreement among educators that maintaining face-to-face contact with kids and using online classroom tools is a vital resource, there is growing concern that the Telecom industry is taking advantage of this crisis to push a new generation of wireless service that is especially unsafe for children - and indeed to everyone else. A prime example is the recent plan to install 5G in the Rutland Public Schools¹.

First, why is wireless internet – especially 5G – is so unsafe for children? The biggest reason is radio frequency radiation (RFR). Schools have the highest density of RFR² of any location, with much curriculum presented via online platforms, and dozens of wireless devices in simultaneous use - despite wired fiber-optics removing dangers of RFR, which is known to have highly negative impacts for children³, including neuropsychiatric effects and increased cancer risk. The American Academy of Pediatrics⁴ warns: “...It is essential that any new standard for wireless devices be based on protecting the youngest and most vulnerable populations to ensure they are safeguarded throughout their lifetimes”.

With the present rollout of 5G, radiation danger to our children is exponentially higher. This is because unlike previous wireless, it uses “small-cell” signal transmitters, emitting higher, smaller wavelength frequency - meaning we are barraged by the signal many more times per second. An area previously served by one tower can now have hundreds of small-cell transmitters, positioned in locations adjacent to buildings and pedestrians. And in order to provide a clear path for its signal, 5G often requires cutting down trees - an absurd choice when the world needs more trees to mitigate climate crisis. Another concern is privacy. By law, schools are required to adhere to privacy regulations – yet it is well known that wireless internet is more vulnerable to hacking than “wired” or fiber optic service.

¹ <https://vtdigger.org/liveblog/vtel-to-provide-rutland-schools-with-free-internet/>

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https://www.theepochtimes.com/wi-fi-in-schools-experimenting-with-the-next-generation_2808921.html?fbclid=IwAR1qrwLXyhZDoT7LRETLTpyrQaw35rn03-2XeJ4IINo3G9cW0xqoMw5LNRo

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https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6701402/?fbclid=IwAR3SDQolf-UzgpDaAg80kjaeDI1OQ_76QhCpRpQws4_v1CAh-a67p11U4IY

⁴ <https://ecfsapi.fcc.gov/file/7520941318.pdf>

In a public space such as a school, wired internet creates an automatic firewall for privacy protection, and since the signal is enclosed in a fiber-optic cable, radiation is no longer a concern. Sound quality is much better, and it is (how much?) faster than 4G wireless. However, despite these huge advantages, schools are still sold on the convenience of handing out chrome books as simply another textbook, disregarding safety information that laptops should be plugged into an ethernet cable and wireless signal turned off. Dangers inherent in wireless technology are sadly not addressed.

Some think that fiber-optic cable is prohibitively expensive, when the truth is that 5G requires a back-haul of fiber-optic cable, and the only difference in cost lies in getting the fiber cable to the premises (FTTP). That cost difference means a choice between wire - or a small-cell antenna mounted dangerously close to a building. This becomes an equity issue where people who live in remote areas for economic reasons could be forced to pay the cost difference in health risks - without any warning at all.

And now the Telecom industry is providing incentives to lure our population into the “trojan horse of 5G”⁵. Their bait is free chrome books from VTel, offered to public school students along with food deliveries during the CoVid-19 shutdown. Dr. Michel Guité, founder of VTel says: “We took a step further by implementing an immediate upgrade using our 5G spectrum to ensure students of Rutland, who may not have access to internet, could receive some of the fastest unlimited wireless in America”⁶. In my opinion, the speed offered by wired internet is plenty fast enough – with definite privacy advantages, and without horrific radiation dangers.

Fortunately, hope still exists for community involvement in these decisions. Vermont’s Broadband Bill⁷ allows for citizens to have some agency, through the CUD (Community Utility District) initiative. In this process, local select boards each choose one contact person to speak to the regional CUD’s about how internet service gets implemented in their community.

But there are glitches. One CUD contact filed a grant for use of wireless canisters without informing their local select board. And U.S. Congressman Peter Welch’s well-intentioned bill “Keeping Critical Connections”, addresses rural connectivity challenges relating to CoVid-19, without providing for industry oversight to ensure local democratic decisions about community preferences – giving the Telecom industry permission to fast-track 5G, and mirroring corporate

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ld28GCZe-UQ&fbclid=IwAR3Im5Z7t8BhkN_bbfHDHV-0sU5Sbis8wEEQkkQi_Fan3bwwJaNQ280oUH0

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<https://vermontbiz.com/news/2020/march/31/vtel-ericsson-mobilize-provide-rutland-city-schools-free-internet>

⁷ <https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2020/Docs/ACTS/ACT079/ACT079%20Act%20Summary.pdf>

bailouts that send money to the top with little or no protections in place for vulnerable populations. What happened to SAFE internet service accessible to all – making connectivity and essential services a healthy choice?

If you share my concerns, look for a forthcoming resolution from “5G Free VT”⁸ for citizens to bring to local select boards about the harmful effects of 5G. Please speak out - we need each other if we are going to stand up to the Telecom agenda. If you have kids at home using wireless to do their school assignments, consider plugging in the ethernet cable instead of the wifi signal going 24/7 - and take frequent breaks. And keep asking questions to demand your right to pursue healthy choices and equal access to the democratic process.

⁸ <https://5gfreevt.wordpress.com/>