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Harm from computer radiation? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

We were wondering what the effects of "computer CRT radiation" would be if you sat behind or to the side of someone's computer. We work in a small office of a large company abroad and people here are very concerned about what long-term effects they might suffer. Conventional wisdom here is that there IS something, so when you walk into our offices, you will see all kinds of poster and papers covering the vents that are supposed to cool the insides of the monitor.

Our office mates normally ask each other to turn off their computers when they are not using them, out of fear of this radiation.

Is this an old wives' tale, or is there some truth to it?

Signed us,
Really paranoid about computers

Answer

Dear Really paranoid about computers,

Whether or not you are truly paranoid, you may be in luck. According to the FDA, there has never been a documented case of human injury or illness resulting from over-exposure to radiation from TV or computer monitors.

Some older TV and computer monitors function using a cathode ray tube (CRT) that creates an image by bouncing electrons off the screen (hence the phrase "watching the tube"). Some studies have shown that a CRT can produce x-rays, but when it does, it does so at very low levels. Flat screen technology more common these days does not use CRTs and thus produces no x-rays at all. The FDA regulates those products that do emit radiation by setting a standard and then monitoring and enforcing that standard. The standard is set with the assumption that even very small amounts of x-rays could be harmful. Thus, all electronics on the market in the U.S. must pass FDA safety standards. These standards may or may not apply where you and your office mates are working.

If you are concerned about radiation levels, know that: A) decreasing time in front of a screen and/or B) increasing distance from the screen will lower your risk of possible radiation exposure. Working in a small office in close proximity to a computer that is turned on is not likely to pose a health risk to you or your office mates.

The computer CRT radiation fear is not necessarily an old wives' tale, but if you are using equipment bought and sold in the U.S., you can most likely relax your worries. You may want to uncover those vents to allow the equipment to cool. For more information, check out the [FDA's page](#) [2] on radiation-emitting household products.

Happy typing!

Alice!

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