



By ALI SWENSON, July 28, 2020

Infrared Thermometers Used for COVID-19 Testing Do Not Pose Risk to Pineal Gland

CLAIM: Infrared thermometers, which are held near the forehead to scan body temperature without direct contact, point an infrared light directly at the brain's pineal gland, exposing it to harmful radiation.

AP'S ASSESSMENT: False. Infrared thermometers don't emit radiation into the brain; they sense heat emitted by the body. They pose no risk to the pineal gland, which is located deep within the brain, according to Dr. Haris Sair, director of neuroradiology at Johns Hopkins University.

THE FACTS: Non-contact infrared thermometers that are held up to a person's forehead have become popular during the COVID-19 pandemic as businesses and governments seek ways to detect possible infection without risk of transmission. These thermometers won't hurt the small endocrine organ deep in your brain called the pineal gland, despite online posts arguing they might.

Social media posts circulating widely on Facebook this week falsely suggested the thermometers are aimed at the same "exact point" as the pineal gland and could be exposing it to some sort of harmful radiation or infrared light.

According to Sair, these posts are false on two counts: the notion that these thermometers target the pineal gland, and the notion that they emit radiation. Infrared thermometers are meant to pick up the natural infrared wavelengths that your body emits, Sair said. They don't send infrared light or wavelengths into the body.

The forehead is also not particularly close to the pineal gland which is located deep within the brain, past several centimeters of brain tissue. The thermometers are designed to pick up surface temperatures.

The Food and Drug Administration has more information about these devices, and how they can be used safely and effectively, on its website.