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Children's charities welcome new mobile phone code to protect children from pornography and paedophiles

New rules being launched by mobile telephone companies on Monday (January 19) will be a major step forward in protecting children from paedophiles and pornography on the internet, say seven children's charities.

Now the Children's Charities' Coalition for Internet Safety (CHIS) is calling on fixed internet companies to introduce equally tough measures to stamp out abuse online.

The code of practice will block access for under 18s to un-moderated chat rooms and "adult-only" sites. CHIS, which includes Barnardos, ChildLine, NCB, NCVCCO, NCH, NSPCC and The Children's Society, has worked closely with the mobile telephone industry to make sure that the new self-regulatory code will protect children.

The coalition also welcomes the establishment of a new, independent, self regulatory body to police the code. But there do remain a few question marks, which CHIS is raising with mobile phone companies. For example, millions of handsets are already being used by children. So how will age verification work for them and the safety software be switched on?

John Carr, NCH's internet consultant and CHIS spokesperson, says: "With the expected explosion in mobile phone technology, it is vital that children are protected from paedophiles and other dangers lurking on the internet. Mobile phone internet access will make it harder for parents to keep a check on what their children are viewing and doing online.

"These new measures are a great step forward for the mobile phone industry and we very much welcome them. Children's charities made a number of recommendations to mobile phone companies about what the code should look like. We're delighted that they've really taken these on board and introduced a raft of measures to protect children.

“But the devil is, however, in the detail. Children’s charities are anxious to see how the code will be implemented and its effects monitored and reviewed. The new code is going to make many people ask why, if the mobile people can do it, the fixed internet people can’t. We are calling on them to take this forward as a matter of urgency.”

Measures in the code include:

- An independent body to be set up to govern what content is not suitable for under 18s.
- Only adults who are able to prove their age will be allowed access to specially classified “18 or over” material and specific chat rooms.
- Advice for children, parents and carers about new mobile phone technology.

Ends

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Available spokespeople:

John Carr, NCH internet consultant; Ute Navidi, ChildLine’s head of policy (and internet expert); Chris Atkinson, NSPCC’s internet safety expert; Tink Palmer, principal policy officer for Barnardos;

Notes to editor

1. CHIS stands for the Children’s Charities Coalition for Internet Safety. CHIS
2. members are Barnardos, ChildLine, NCB, NCVCCO, NCH, NSPCC and The Children’s Society.
3. Mobile phone operators taking part are Orange, O2, T-Mobile, Virgin Mobile, Vodaphone and 3.
4. A report published by NCH this week (Monday, January 12), revealed a 1500 per cent increase in the number of people cautioned or charged with child pornography offences. In 1988 this figure was 35 and jumped to 549 in 2001. John Carr, author of *Child Abuse, Child Pornography and the Internet*, said child abuse images have acted as a crucial trigger for some men to sexually abuse children. He added that an increase in the distribution of child pornography through the internet is likely to lead to an increase in the sexual abuse of children.