EHP has been taking an active look at the connection between air pollution and respiratory infections such as COVID-19. What we’re finding is a stronger relationship than you might imagine. As our blog post “Air Pollution and Respiratory Infections: Q&A” notes, if you’ve been exposed to air pollution and you contract a respiratory infection, your symptoms may be more severe.

“A number of scientific studies have shown a link between air pollution and respiratory infections,” said EHP’s public health nurse Sarah Rankin, MPH, RN. “These studies show that being exposed to air pollution may aid in making a respiratory infection worse. It might also increase your chances of getting a respiratory infection in the first place.”

Naturally, at EHP, we want to offer ways you can help to protect your health and your family’s health from the effects of pollution in your air. The Q&A blog post talks about how you can monitor the air in and around your home and suggests steps you can take to reduce pollution there. Along those lines, EHP has produced a short video explaining how to make an affordable and effective air filter using a box fan and a HEPA-certified furnace filter. This DIY fan/furnace filter can help to make your home’s air cleaner.

If you want to take a deeper dive into the science behind the relationship between air pollution and respiratory infection, you might be interested in EHP’s review of the studies mentioned above. “Air Pollution and Respiratory Infections: Reviewing the Science” looks at more than two dozen research studies that tackle the issue from the standpoint of disease severity, hospitalizations and emergency room visits, and deaths during pandemics, including COVID-19.

Feel free to contact EHP for more information on air pollution and its affect on your health and well-being.

I am both thrilled and honored to be stepping into some big shoes here at EHP. Over my first three months on the job, I have felt incredibly lucky to have the support of such a strong, capable team. During that time, we have been working together to examine our organizational skills and fine-tune our program offerings.

To that end, I am excited to announce that we are welcoming two additional team members to the organization: Patrick Dooling, our Deputy Director who will oversee smooth daily operations, and Nathan Deron, our Environmental Data Scientist who will ensure clear translation of our data into actionable information for our stakeholders.

Despite staff transitions and a global pandemic, EHP continues to offer our expertise on issues that impact public health. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you for your warm welcome and continued support of EHP.

Alison L. Steele
Executive Director

Follow us on social media!
Shale gas development has expanded rapidly in Pennsylvania and now is embedded in many communities. This buildout concerns not just well pads and gas extraction, but moving the gas, processing it into its component parts, refining it at petrochemical plants, and producing plastics.

Lois Bower-Bjornson has lived through this development, witnessing the impacts on lives in her community. Her desire to learn about the issues and educate current and future generations led her to initiate Frackland Tours in Washington County, PA. The tours consist of presentations on pollution and health impacts followed by a physical tour of shale gas infrastructure in Washington County. Along the way, many impacted residents share their stories on how their lives and health have been impacted.

The Frackland Tours illustrate the density of gas infrastructure on the ground and put a human face on the health impacts and quality of life issues that accompany shale gas development. Now, in a webinar, we are able to take you on a virtual Frackland Tour.

This webinar was hosted by Southwest Pennsylvania Environmental Health Project (SWPA EHP) and Physicians for Social Responsibility of Pennsylvania (PSR-PA). The webinar is a collaborative effort of Lois Bower-Bjornson, SWPA EHP, PSR-PA, Breathe Project, Earthworks, and Clean Air Council.

A recorded video of the virtual tour can be viewed here.

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NEW HANDOUTS

**Air Pollution and Respiratory Infections: Reviewing the Science** – May 2020
Long-term exposure to air pollution contributes to the development of a number of chronic cardiac and respiratory illnesses, which increase the severity and risk of dying from respiratory infections. The science is clear that air pollution (like particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide, and ozone) is a strong driver of disease, both infectious and non-infectious.

**Asthma and Shale Gas Development** – April 2020
Asthma attacks may be triggered by indoor and outdoor air pollution, stress, and other physical and environmental factors. Research suggests that exposure to air pollution, especially early in life, may play a role in actually developing the disease. Both air quality impacts and social/psychological effects are serious public health concerns for asthma patients living near to shale gas development.

**Health Outcomes Associated with Exposure to Shale Gas Development from Peer-Reviewed Epidemiological Literature** – February 2020
This handout presents epidemiological studies that have found statistically significant associations between exposure to shale gas development and adverse health outcomes.

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FRACKLAND TOUR: VIRTUAL EDITION

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How Methane Affects Your Health

Methane is the primary component of natural gas, and most natural gas currently produced here is through shale gas development. If you live close to shale gas development, you have a higher risk of experiencing poor health outcomes than if you lived elsewhere. Read more about methane and its effects here.

Why Do Spikes or Peaks in Emissions Matter?
Imagine this: You suffer from a health issue — nosebleeds, headaches, nausea, or even a more serious complication such as asthma — and you suspect this issue has something to do with a nearby shale gas well. You make a complaint to the Pennsylvania DEP, but you receive an unsatisfactory answer. They say the air quality is fine. What’s going on? Read about spikes and peaks in emissions and how they can impact your health here.

Pregnant Women and Fracking: A Case for Special Concern
While pollutants from fracking can be harmful for everyone, those who are more vulnerable to the effects of emissions are even more at risk. The closer an expecting mother lives to shale gas facilities, and the more she is exposed to the harmful substances shale gas development generates, the more likely it is that her baby may be born underweight or with birth defects. Read more here.

NEW BLOG POSTS

How Methane Affects Your Health
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NEW ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH CHANNEL STORY

In the early morning hours of September 10, 2018, the residents of Ivy Lane went about their business as usual — sleeping, getting ready for work, reading the news. Around 5 a.m., the neighborhood would be changed forever when a gathering pipeline for natural gas and natural gas liquids in the hillside behind their block exploded.

Read the story of Karen Gdula, an Ivy Lane resident, and her neighbors here.
Follow us on social media!