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Researchers at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health studied the potential impact of shale gas development on asthma exacerbations between 2005 and 2012. Asthma exacerbations are characterized by shortness of breath, wheezing, coughing, and/or chest tightness resulting from inflammation that restricts air flow to and from an individual’s lungs. Researchers looked at the records of 35,508 Geisinger Health System asthma patients who needed medical treatment for an exacerbation categorized by three levels of severity: mild (only oral corticosteroid needed), moderate (emergency department visit), and high (hospitalization required). These researchers then looked at the shale gas development activity near the patients’ residence the day before the patient sought medical treatment. They found those with the highest level of exposure to shale gas wells in each phase of production (defined here by proximity and density of wells as well as characteristics unique to the phase of well development which was occurring) were more likely to experience asthma exacerbations of all three severity levels when compared to those with very low exposure. The strongest associations were seen during stimulation and production phases of development, during which the most exposed asthma sufferers were 3 and 4 times more likely to experience an asthma attack (respectively) than those not living near shale gas development.

To learn more about this study, check out these links:

Baltimore Sun New Release: Fracking linked to asthma attacks in Hopkins study