A research team from UCLA and USC took a novel approach to examining the relationship between poor birth outcomes and shale gas development in south Texas by specifically considering proximity to flaring events, not simply proximity to existing and active shale gas infrastructure. Flaring is a procedure used by the fossil fuel industry to burn off excess natural gas during drilling, producing, and transporting oil and gas. Flaring events release numerous hazardous air pollutants, including carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, heavy metals, VOCs, and particulate matter. They also produce a loud noise and a large, brightly visible flame that can last as long as several weeks during well production testing.

The authors of this study looked back at 23,487 birth records in Texas’ Eagle Ford Shale region from between 2012 and 2015. Then they looked at the birth outcomes from mothers exposed to the most flaring events, based on satellite observations, within a five kilometer radius of their homes during pregnancy and compared them to the birth outcomes from mothers who were not exposed to flaring events during their pregnancies. Between these two groups they saw 50% higher odds of preterm birth and shorter gestation in the group exposed to flares.

Researchers note that these associations were especially prevalent in women who identified as Hispanic or Latina. Women of color and lower socioeconomic status may be more vulnerable to health impacts from flaring events for several reasons, including preexisting health status; greater co-exposures to other pollutants; psychosocial stress associated with poverty or discrimination; and limited access to healthcare, proper nutrition, and social services. Hispanic residents in Texas have a median household income of $41,177 as compared to $65,786 for non-Hispanic whites.

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

Environmental Health News: [Babies born near natural gas flaring are 50 percent more likely to be premature: Study](#)