

Suggested link between radon and skin cancer

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A new study published this week suggests that a link may exist between radon exposure and non-melanoma skin cancer.

Researchers from the European Centre for Environment & Human Health (part of the Peninsula College of Medicine & Dentistry) have detected a connection following analysis of data on radon exposure and skin cancer cases from across southwest England. The study, which looked at small geographical areas across Devon and Cornwall, builds upon a similar study conducted 15 years ago.

Radon is a naturally occurring, radioactive gas found in soil and bedrock common in parts of the southwest. It has been recognised as a minor contributor to cases of lung cancer, but so far there has been no firm evidence to suggest it has wider health implications.

Whilst both radon levels and skin cancer incidence in the southwest are amongst the highest in the UK, the study found no association between household radon levels and malignant [melanoma](#), or the most common form of skin cancer basal cell carcinoma. However, a link was found between areas where high radon concentrations are found and a particular type of non-melanoma skin cancer called squamous cell carcinoma.

The analysis took account of the way population characteristics, exposure to sunshine and proximity to the coast vary across the region. However, the researchers highlighted people's exposure to ultraviolet

(UV) radiation from the sun as a particularly difficult factor to account for, especially as this represents an important risk factor for developing skin cancer.

Despite the limitations of the study, researchers feel it is an important area needing further investigation. Lead author of the study, Dr Ben Wheeler said

"We know that naturally occurring radon is a contributing factor to a small proportion of lung cancers, but there is limited evidence of other health implications. These findings suggest that the issue of [radon](#) and [skin cancer](#) deserves a much closer look and we're planning to develop a more detailed study capable of detecting a direct relationship, if one actually exists".

More information: The full paper can be found here:
[journals.lww.com/epidem/Abstra ... gland An.99531.aspx](https://journals.lww.com/epidem/Abstract/2011/11050/Link_between_radon_and_skin_cancer_An.99531.aspx)

Provided by The Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry

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