

Is UK shale gas extraction posing a risk to public health?

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More needs to be done to investigate the risks to human health that extracting shale gas poses, suggests a personal view published in *BMJ* today.

Dr. Seth Shonkoff, Executive Director for Physicians Scientists and Engineers for Healthy Energy, and his colleagues say that operations to produce [natural gas](#) from formations such as shale sometimes occur "close to human populations", but efforts to understand the potential impacts have fallen short, focusing on regulations rather than on health outcomes.

He says that risk reduction technologies should certainly be deployed, but that reviewing the [public health](#) implications of shale gas development "requires more than merely gesturing to technological improvements". "Best practices", he adds, "should not be mistaken for actual practices". In other words, Dr. Shonkoff asserts that scientific data should drive decisions on health and safety, instead of gestures to understudied assertions of best practice deployment.

The recent Public Health England draft report on the extraction of shale gas does "recognize that many uncertainties surround the public health implications", however, there are "problems with its conclusions".

Dr. Shonkoff adds that many "public health impacts remain undetermined and more environmental and public health studies are needed". He says "more attention should have been paid to drilling in

areas that are densely populated" especially following results from studies, which suggest that health risks have direct relation to the "geographical proximity of residences to active shale gas extraction" with further evidence suggesting adverse birth outcomes.

Dr. Shonkoff concludes that there is a need for the "assessment of the [public health infrastructure](#) and the ability of healthcare professionals to respond to the risks presented by the development of the [shale gas industry](#)" and that rigorous research is needed to assess the risks to public health.

Provided by British Medical Journal

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