

Oil & Gas Health Information & Response Program

Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Oil and Gas Health Information and Response Program?

The program was created by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment to respond to public concerns about health related to oil and gas activities. It will also gather up-to-date information about oil and gas activities, with a focus on health, and make it accessible to the public.



How will the Oil and Gas Health Information and Response Program help the people of Colorado?



- The program will allow people to talk with staff who are knowledgeable about possible impacts of oil and gas on health.
- For people with symptoms they believe might be due to oil and gas activities, we will work to help identify possible causes.
- In response to community or individual health concerns, we may work with individuals' health care providers, local public and environmental health agencies, state air quality specialists and/or oil and gas inspectors.
- By doing this work and collecting information, we will learn more about possible health effects related to oil and gas operations and will share what we learn with the public, researchers and policy makers.

How can I be exposed to chemicals or pollutants from oil and gas operations?

The main way you could be exposed to chemicals or other pollutants due to oil and gas operations is through the air. There is also the possibility of exposure through surface water, ground water or soil, but this is much less likely under normal operating conditions. Whether or not you are exposed and how much exposure you receive depends on many factors specific to your situation.

Possible exposure through the air depends on the amount of chemicals or pollutants released at an oil and gas site, distance from the site, and weather conditions. The main chemicals and pollutants that might be released include:

- > natural gases like methane and propane
- > many different VOC's (volatile organic compounds)
- > pollutants from the diesel exhaust of trucks and equipment
- > particulate matter such as dust and smoke

Possible exposure through water could occur if fluids contaminated surface or groundwater. In Colorado, hydraulic fracturing generally occurs hundreds or thousands of feet below aquifers, so the main way contamination could occur is as a result of a surface spill during operations. The types and amounts of chemicals present depend on the specific site and the type of activities happening on that site. For more detailed information, see our [Clearinghouse](#)



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What about noise, light or odors?

These are common complaints related to oil and gas operations. Each of these has specific rules that operators must follow to reduce their effect on people living near oil and gas operations. The effects of each of these can be very different from person-to-person, depending on individual sensitivity. For more detailed information, see our [Clearinghouse](#)

What health effects are reported by people living near oil and gas operations?

Some short term health effects reported by people living near oil and gas operations include irritation of the eyes, nose, throat, lungs or skin, or other symptoms like headache, dizziness or nausea and vomiting. Some also report sleep disturbance or anxiety. There is very little information about long term health effects in people living near oil and gas operations. The amount of scientific literature on the connection between oil and gas related exposures and health effects is currently limited but is growing.



Are oil and gas operations causing my symptoms?



We usually can't make a definite connection. It is difficult to determine whether symptoms are related to oil and gas operations or have other causes. The effects of any oil and gas exposure you may experience depend on many factors, including the types and amounts of chemicals released and personal factors that may increase your sensitivity. If you are worried about a symptom you are experiencing, please contact us by filling out our [Self-referral form](#) or calling the CO HELP line at 303-389-1687.

When should I seek medical care?

You should see your healthcare provider, call 911 or seek emergency care for concerning symptoms, including:

- > trouble breathing or chest pain
- > severe headache or vision changes
- > fever over 101 degrees that doesn't come down with acetaminophen or ibuprofen
- > severe stomach pain
- > other concerning symptoms that are getting worse, that don't go away or that get in the way of your regular activities



Who regulates Oil and Gas in Colorado?



Oil and gas operations are mainly regulated at the state level. The Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (COGCC) is responsible for developing and enforcing most regulations within the state. Air emissions and odors are regulated by the Air Pollution Control Division at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. Both of these agencies conduct inspections, respond to complaints and enforce the rules designed to protect public health, safety and welfare and the environment. For more detailed information, including links to current regulations, see our [Clearinghouse](#)

How can I discuss a health concern with someone in the program?

Please fill out the web-based form available on this site [Self-referral form](#) OR call the CO HELP line at 303-389-1687 where staff can answer basic questions and have an oil and gas health specialist follow-up with you.

