Author's response to reviews

Title: Meteorologically estimated exposure but not distance predicts asthma symptoms in schoolchildren in the environs of a petrochemical refinery: a cross-sectional study

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To the editors
Environmental health

1. We have attended to all of the editorial requests regarding presentation. We also added an Abbreviations section as requested, but excluded abbreviations for “odds ratio” and “confidence interval” as they are in such common usage. These are abbreviated after first use in the text in the usual way.

2. The substantive point raised by one of the referees and the editor is dealt with as follows.

Re-review by Nilsa I Loyo-Berrios

Previous question no. 3 related to the high prevalence of smoking in study area. The authors response includes a statement that they have no smoking prevalence data for the comparison area. The fact that smoking prevalence was high in adults and children in the study area and that no such data is available for the control area, should be specifically raised as one of the main study limitations. This should be clearly mentioned in the discussion. Smoking and exposure to second hand smoking are well known factors that exacerbate asthma. The have a general statement about confounding factors, but that is not sufficient. They need to present detail discussion of what those confounders factors are, specially smoking.

Editor’s comment

We would agree with the reviewer that a caveat on the lack of smoking data deserves to be included in the discussion.

Our response

To the first paragraph of the discussion, as it currently appears: “The first finding was that children residing in the areas around the petrochemical refinery reported a higher prevalence of asthma symptoms than children of the same age and socioeconomic status in other areas of the city. No other covariates were controlled for in this part of the analysis and it is possible that some of the excess was due to differences in area characteristics relevant to asthma risk.”,

we have added the following:

“In particular, the questionnaires recorded high prevalences of both passive smoking and having actively tried smoking. As comparable smoking data were not available from the city wide ISAAC study, exposure to tobacco smoke could be a contributor to the asthma symptom excess in this population.”

Yours sincerely,

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