Health & Medicine

New Flight Routes Save Time but Damage Health

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More airplanes are flying directly over densely populated areas, thanks to airport computer systems that automatically chart the most efficient routes. But a new study by researchers at Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health concludes that the benefits of the reduced flight times are outweighed by the health effects on

residents below. Looking at the increase in noise pollution around New York City's LaGuardia Airport since routes were changed in 2012, the researchers determined that people living in certain Queens neighborhoods will lose an average of one year of good health over the course of their lifetimes, due to their heightened risk of cardiovascular disease and other ailments linked to stress.

"Ideally, airports should be built farther away from urban centers," says lead author Peter Muennig '98PH, a professor of health policy and management. "The next-best option is to use flight patterns that send planes over green space, waterways, and industrial areas."

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