

THE IMPACT OF SCHEDULING BIRTH EARLY ON INFANT HEALTH

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Abstract

We take advantage of a unique natural experiment to provide new, credible evidence on the health consequences of scheduling birth early for non-medical reasons. In May 2010, the Spanish government announced that a €2,500 universal “baby bonus” would stop being paid to babies born after December 31st, 2010. Using administrative data from birth certificates and hospital records, we find that about 2,000 families shifted their date of birth from January 2011 to December 2010 (out of 9,000 weekly births). The affected babies, born about one week early on average, weighed about 200 grams less at birth, and suffered a sizeable increase in hospitalization rates in the first two months of life, mostly for respiratory disease. (JEL: H31, I12, J13)

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