

The Effects of Maternity Leave on Children's Birth and Infant Health Outcomes in the United States

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Abstract

This paper evaluates the impacts of unpaid maternity leave provisions of the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) on children's birth and infant health outcomes in the United States. My identification strategy uses variation in pre-FMLA maternity leave policies across states and variation in which firms are covered by FMLA provisions. Using Vital Statistics data and difference-in-difference-in-difference methodology, I find that maternity leave led to small increases in birth weight, decreases in the likelihood of a premature birth, and substantial decreases in infant mortality for children of college-educated and married mothers, who were most able to take advantage of unpaid leave. My results are robust to the inclusion of numerous controls for maternal, child, and county characteristics, state and year fixed effects, and state-year interactions, as well as across several different specifications.