

Mothers from affluent neighborhoods near highways increase odds of low weight babies by 81 percent

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Living near city expressways is associated with adverse birth effects on expectant mothers and their newborns, according to a novel study with global implications. In the August edition of the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, scientists from the Université de Montréal and the University of South Australia reveal that women living closest to expressways are more vulnerable to highway pollution – especially affluent mothers.

"We found a disproportionately high association between living close to a highway and birth complications among affluent mothers," said the study's lead author, Dr. Méli^ssa G^en^ereux, who completed the research at the Université de Montréal's Department of Social and Preventive Medicine. "Among affluent mothers who live within 200 metres of a highway, the odds of delivering an infant with low birth weight increase by 81 percent, while their odds of delivering a preterm baby increase by 58 percent compared to mothers who don't live anywhere close to expressways."

Using data from the Quebec birth registry, the research team evaluated statistics from 100,000 new births recorded over a five-year span. The scientists concentrated on data from Canada's second biggest city, Montreal, where highways cut through affluent and poor neighbourhoods alike.

Wealthy women more vulnerable

The study was the first to examine proximity to pollution as a cause for adverse effects on birth. And the scientists discovered that mothers living within 200 metres from major highways – especially women from higher socioeconomic neighbourhoods – were more likely to deliver preterm, low weight or smaller babies.

"Advantaged mothers may be more susceptible to highway pollution, possibly because they have been protected from other hazards present in low income neighbourhoods," explained Dr. Généreux, who's also a resident at Maisonneuve-Rosemont Hospital, a Université de Montréal affiliated institution. "We found a disproportionately high association between living close to a highway and birth complications among affluent mothers."

Source: University of Montreal

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