

Surge in births after deadly New Zealand quake

March 1 2011

As many as 240 people likely died in New Zealand's devastating earthquake, but health services have also been stretched coping with a different problem -- a surge in new life.

Canterbury district health director David Meates said there had been a "real pressure" to deal with births after last week's 6.3-magnitude tremor, and that [premature babies](#) packed out Christchurch Hospital's neonatal unit.

"Earthquakes do tend to hurry things along for those intending to deliver," said Meates of the surge in births, which saw some 76 maternity patients hospitalised in the days after the February 22 quake.

So many births followed the deadly jolt that some babies had to be transferred to North Island hospitals while Christchurch Hospital put out a call for extra [midwives](#) from across the country.

An even greater spike was seen after last September's 7.0-level tremor, when 21 babies were born at the hospital in the following 24 hours, a record number for a Saturday.

"It's just one of those things. You could blame it on the full moon or the high tide. I think anecdotally people go into survival mode," Canterbury midwifery director Samantha Burke told local media.

Christchurch woman Jo Blackman visited her midwife just hours before

the [earthquake](#) and was told not to expect her baby for a few more days. When the tremor struck, all she could think about was rushing through her shuddering house to reach her two-year-old son, Josh.

"I didn't even think about the pregnancy -- I just wanted to get to Josh," Blackman, 34, told Fairfax newspapers. "Then when my husband got back and we were looking at a few cracks in the house I suddenly felt my [contractions](#)."

Baby Alyssa was born at 7:30 pm as frantic searches continued for survivors in central Christchurch and as hundreds of injured people were tended on surrounding floors.

"It was just good to have a healthy baby girl born into the world when so many others were experiencing suffering and loss," she said.

Among those who went into labour during the quake was the sister of New Zealand soccer captain Ryan Nelsen.

Nelsen is making his way home to Christchurch, hoping to help in the recovery after gaining permission from his Blackburn Rovers.

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