

# Electronic medical records lower infant mortality, study finds

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Expanded use of electronic medical records would substantially reduce infant mortality in the U.S., according to a study forthcoming in the *Journal of Political Economy*.

A 10 percent increase in hospital use of basic [electronic records](#) would save 16 babies for every 100,000 [live births](#), the study found. A complete national transition to electronic records would save an estimated 6,400 infants each year in the U.S.

Many [health professionals](#) have advocated electronic records as a way to improve care and curb costs. For obstetricians, electronic records might make it easier to identify high risk pregnancies and coordinate care. However, until now there had been surprisingly little empirical data to support those assumptions, according to the study's authors, Amalia Miller of the University of Virginia and the RAND Corporation and Catherine Tucker of the MIT Sloan School of Management.

"This paper offers evidence that suggests cautious optimism about the potential value of ... [electronic records] in improving neonatal health outcomes and current health policy that is directed towards increasing the spread of these technologies," the researchers write.

In addition to improving care, electronic records would be cost-effective compared to other healthcare interventions, the research found. Miller and Tucker estimate the cost of saving one baby through [electronic medical records](#) to be about \$531,000. By comparison, a large expansion

in Medicaid coverage for children in the 1980s cost about \$840,000 per life saved.

The study compared infant death rates at hospitals with and without electronic records in more than 2,500 U.S. counties over 12 years. The extensive data set allowed the researchers to control for other factors that may influence infant mortality, such as a county's socioeconomic status.

Each year 18,000 [babies](#) die in the U.S. within 28 days of birth. That places the U.S. 43rd worldwide in [infant mortality](#) rate—on par with nations like Slovakia and Montenegro and behind most of the European Union. Slow adoption of electronic records compared to other industrial nations is playing a substantial role in the low U.S. ranking, the study suggests.

It also suggests that the \$19.2 billion earmarked for electronic records in the 2009 economic stimulus package was money well spent. "These findings provide an empirical basis for government policy intervention to hasten the diffusion of healthcare [information technology]," the researchers conclude.

**More information:** Amalia R. Miller and Catherine Tucker, "Can Healthcare IT Save Babies?" *Journal of Political Economy* 119:2.

Provided by University of Chicago

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