

Increase in minimum wage will save infant lives, study shows

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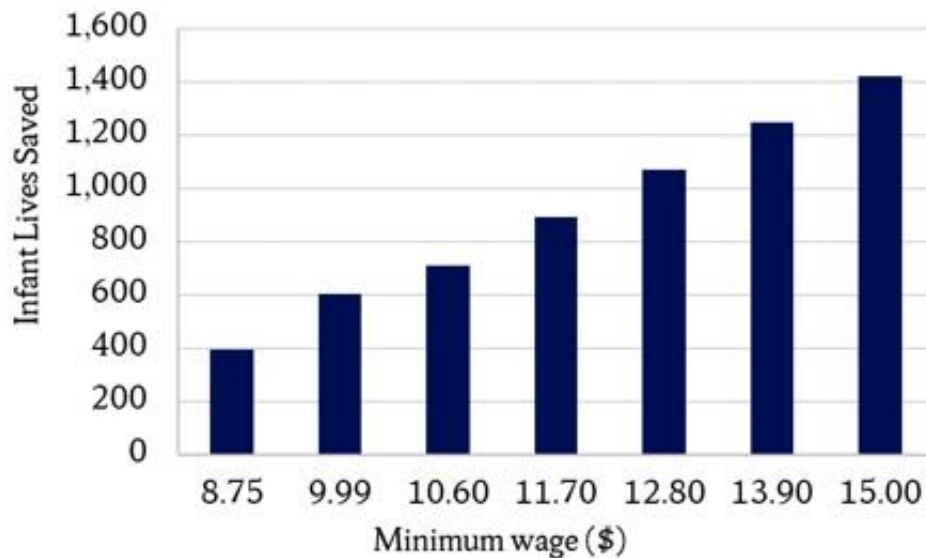
As President Joe Biden seeks to raise the federal minimum wage, a new study published recently by researchers from Syracuse University shows that a higher minimum wage will reduce infant deaths.

In the study, "Effects of US state preemption laws on [infant mortality](#)," Syracuse University professors found that each additional dollar of minimum [wage](#) reduces infant deaths by up to 1.8 percent annually in large U.S. cities. The study was published recently by *Preventive Medicine*.

The federal minimum wage has not been increased since 2009, and Biden's \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan to aid those hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic calls for Congress to raise the minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$15 per hour. Recent attempts to increase the minimum wage have been opposed by states that have prevented city and county governments from raising the minimum wage in their localities.

Research has shown that a higher minimum wage reduces [teenage pregnancy](#), maternal smoking, obesity, and adverse birth outcomes such as low-weight births and infant deaths.

Using data on infant deaths in each county from the 2001-18 National Center for Health Statistics mortality files, and data on minimum wage levels from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the researchers examined how many infant lives would have been saved if states had not prevented cities and counties from raising their minimum wages.



A new study published recently by researchers from Syracuse University shows that a higher minimum wage will reduce infant deaths. Credit: Wolf, Monnat, & Montez, 2021. ("Effects of U.S. State Preemption Laws on Infant Mortality." *Preventive Medicine* 145.)

Here are their key findings:

- States are increasingly preempting city and county governments from enacting policies that benefit workers, such as raising the minimum wage.
- Each additional dollar of minimum wage reduces infant deaths by up to 1.8% annually in large U.S. cities.
- In the 25 states that preempted minimum wage increases, more than 600 [infants](#) could have been saved annually if localities had been allowed to raise their wage to \$9.99.
- More than 1,400 infants could have been saved annually if localities had been allowed to raise the minimum wage to \$15.
- State laws that prevent cities and counties from raising their minimum wage contribute to [infant deaths](#).

Opponents of a \$15 federal minimum wage say more than one million people may become jobless because of the impact on businesses, with teenagers, part-time workers, and those with only a high school diploma most affected.

"Those opposed to raising the wage worry about a potential rise in unemployment," the researchers concluded in their study. "Any such effect on unemployment should be weighed against the benefits of lifting people out of poverty and saving infant lives via more livable wages.

"Keeping the [minimum wage](#) low may protect business profits and keep prices lower for consumers," the researchers said, "but our results suggest that the tradeoff in human lives is steep."

More information: Douglas A. Wolf et al. Effects of US state preemption laws on infant mortality, *Preventive Medicine* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.ypmed.2021.106417](#)

Provided by Syracuse University

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