The Importance of Prenatal Health for Future Productivity

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Acquiring Skills During Childhood

Economic returns to:

• 4-year college
• 2-year college
• Extra year of schooling
• Reduced class size in primary school
• Pre-school/Head Start
• *Prenatal period*?
Evidence on the Importance of *In Utero* Health for Long Run Well Being

- 10% increase in birth weight leads to 1% increase in earnings

- Specific prenatal health events
  - Famine *in utero* reduces educational attainment
  - Infections *in utero* reduces education, IQ, and wages

- Will briefly highlight results from 1918 Influenza Pandemic
Pandemic peaked in late in 1918....Those *in utero* had worse health 70 years later.
Long-term impacts of 1918 Influenza Pandemic

Prenatal infection:

• 20% increase in cardiovascular disease
• 15% less likely to graduate from high school
• 20% increase in likelihood prevented from working by a disability
• 5-9% lower wages
Three policy suggestions

1. Boosting influenza vaccination rates among women of childbearing ages

2. Accelerating enrollment into existing nutrition programs
   - First trimester has important long-term productivity effects

3. Facilitate early recognition of pregnancies
   - Roughly half pregnancies not recognized until after first month
   - Recognizing a pregnancy can trigger positive behavioral changes