

Flint water crisis caused increase in fetal deaths, lower fertility rates, study claims

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The long-term health effects of the Flint water crisis are still unfolding, with a new study pointing to the contaminated water as a cause of lower fertility rates among the city's women and an increase in infant mortality.

The paper, published Wednesday by two University of Kansas economic professors, challenges a draft report issued by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services that found no link between negative birth outcomes and the water switch, MLive.com reported.

In the latest findings, David Slusky and Daniel Grossman reported fetal death rates rose by 58 percent, while the fertility rate among the city's women dipped by 12 percent, the news outlet report. The two issued their findings after analyzing Flint birth and death certificates issued before and after the city switched its water source in 2014.

"This represents a couple hundred fewer children born that otherwise would have been," Slusky said, according to MLive.com.

The duo also found disparities in the health of children born in Flint after the city switched its water source compared to children born elsewhere in the state. They also noted no change in sexual activity among residents, indicating the water's potential adverse effect on fertility, MLive.com reported.

A DHHS spokesman was not available to comment on the latest findings, MLive.com reported.

In January, environmental officials said the city's water system no longer contained levels of lead exceeding the federal limit.

"This is good news and the result of many partners on local, county, state and federal levels working together to restore the water quality in the City of Flint," Heidi Grether, director of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality said in a statement, at the time. "The Flint water system is one of the most monitored systems in the country for lead and copper, and that commitment will remain to ensure residents continue to have access to clean water."

The state acknowledged the lead problem in October 2015. Lead from old pipes leached into the water supply because corrosion-reducing phosphates were not added due to an incorrect reading of federal regulations.

Elevated levels of lead, a neurotoxin, were detected in children, and 12 people died in a Legionnaires' disease outbreak that experts suspect was linked to the improperly treated water.

Gov. Rick Snyder has apologized for the crisis that has largely been blamed on his administration.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.