

**Note for the Media WHO/Bulletin  
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### **Inducing labour more risky than leaving it to nature**

Healthy pregnant women may risk unnecessary complications if labour is induced without any medical justification, according to research published today in the *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*.

This extensive study compared the outcomes of elective induction versus spontaneous onset of labour in almost 40 000 deliveries in Latin American women with low-risk pregnancies. Labour may be started artificially by rupturing or sweeping the membranes, using medications such as prostaglandins or oxytocin, or a combination of these methods.

The study found that women whose labour was artificially induced were three times as likely to require anaesthesia during labour and/or to be admitted to intensive care. The study also found increased risk of caesarean section and other medical interventions.

“Elective induction of labour without any medical reason is becoming increasingly common,” says researcher Dr José Cecatti of the University of Campinas in Brazil. “These inductions may be demanded by mothers, or for reasons such as distance to the hospital or to suit the doctor’s schedule. We must be cautious about inducing labour unnecessarily as the increased risk of adverse outcomes is not balanced by clear benefits.”

This study did not find any increased risk to the health of babies born after elective induction, except that their mothers were 22% more likely to be late in starting breastfeeding. Instead of starting within the first hour of the birth as recommended by the World Health Organization, breastfeeding was more likely delayed for up to seven days after birth.

Read the paper here: <http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/89/9/08-061226.pdf>

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The *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* is one of the world's leading public health journals. It is the flagship periodical of WHO, with a special focus on developing countries. Articles are peer-reviewed and are independent of WHO guidelines. Abstracts are now available in the six official languages of the United Nations.

Further items in this month's issue include:

- Cervical cancer screening: world's "best buy" for cancer prevention
- Can faith-based organizations help prevent heart disease?
- Call for attention on neglected health of women prisoners
- Technology widens world for people with visual impairments
- Pertussis boosters for teens: what's the best strategy?
- Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, General Secretary of the World YWCA, conveys her passion for leading change for women

The September issue table of contents can be found at:

<http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/89/9/en/index.html>

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