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## The Asian Games, Air Pollution and Birth Outcomes in South China: An Instrumental Variable Approach

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## Abstract

We estimate the causal effects of air pollution exposure on low birthweight, birthweight, and prematurity risk in South China, for all expectant mothers and by maternal age group and child sex. We do so by exploiting exogenous improvement in air quality during the 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games, when strict regulations were mandated to assure better air quality. We use daily air pollution levels collected from monitoring stations in Guangzhou, the Asian Games host city, and Shenzhen, a nearby control city, between 2009 and 2011. We first show that air quality during the Asian Games significantly improved in Guangzhou, relative to Shenzhen. Further, using birth-certificate data for both cities for 2009 to 2011 and using expected pregnancy overlap with the Asian Games as an instrumental variable, we study the effects of three pollutants (PM<sub>10</sub>, SO<sub>2</sub>, NO<sub>2</sub>) on birth outcomes. Results show that 1) air pollutants significantly reduced average birthweight and increased preterm risk; 2) for birthweight, late pregnancy is most sensitive to PM<sub>10</sub> exposure, but there is not consistent evidence of a sensitive period for other pollutants and outcomes; 3) for birthweight, babies of mothers who are at least 35 years old show more vulnerability to all three air pollutants; and 4) male babies show more vulnerability than female babies to PM<sub>10</sub> and SO<sub>2</sub>, but birthweights of female babies are more sensitive than those of male babies to NO<sub>2</sub>.

## Keywords

ambient air pollution, birthweights, preterm births, instrumental variable, China

## Disciplines

Demography, Population, and Ecology | Environmental Public Health | Family, Life Course, and Society | Maternal and Child Health | Place and Environment | Social and Behavioral Sciences | Sociology

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# The Asian Games, Air Pollution and Birth Outcomes in South China: an Instrumental Variable Approach<sup>\*†</sup>

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## Abstract

We estimate the causal effects of air pollution exposure on low birthweight, birthweight, and prematurity risk in South China, for all expectant mothers and by maternal age group and child sex. We do so by exploiting exogenous improvement in air quality during the 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games, when strict regulations were mandated to assure better air quality. We use daily air pollution levels collected from monitoring stations in Guangzhou, the Asian Games host city, and Shenzhen, a nearby control city, between 2009 and 2011. We first show that air quality during the Asian Games significantly improved in Guangzhou, relative to Shenzhen. Further, using birth-certificate data for both cities for 2009 to 2011 and using expected pregnancy overlap with the Asian Games as an instrumental variable, we study the effects of three pollutants ( $PM_{10}$ ,  $SO_2$ ,  $NO_2$ ) on birth outcomes. Results show that 1) air pollutants significantly reduced average birthweight and increased preterm risk; 2) for birthweight, late pregnancy is most sensitive to  $PM_{10}$  exposure, but there is not consistent evidence of a sensitive period for other pollutants and outcomes; 3) for birthweight, babies of mothers who are at least 35 years old show more vulnerability to all three air pollutants; and 4) male babies show more vulnerability than female babies to  $PM_{10}$  and  $SO_2$ , but birthweights of female babies are more sensitive than those of male babies to  $NO_2$ .

**Key words:** ambient air pollution, birthweights, preterm births, instrumental variable, China

**JEL codes:** I1, I12, I14, I18, Q51, Q52, Q53, Q54

## 1 Introduction

In 2016, 91% of the world's population lived in areas that exceeded the World Health Organization air quality guidelines for ambient fine particulate matter  $PM_{2.5}$  (airborne particles less than or equal to 2.5 micrometers in aerodynamic diameter) concentrations of  $10 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ , but nearly all (86%) of the most extreme concentrations (above  $75 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ) were experienced by populations in China, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh (Health Effects Institute, 2019). The World Health Organization estimates that 4.2 million premature deaths every year are linked to ambient air pollution (World Health Organization, WHO). Pregnant women and children may be particularly vulnerable to the ill effects of air pollution. Despite natural barriers protecting infants in utero, prenatal air pollution exposures have been linked to adverse birth outcomes (Fu et al., 2019; Huang et al., 2019; Šrám et al., 2005; Tsoli, Ploubidis and Kalantzi, 2019; Currie et al., 2014), and effects may persist into later childhood (Almond, Edlund and Palme, 2009; Almond, Currie and Duque, 2018; Currie et al., 2014; Tang et al., 2014; Bharadwaj et al., 2017; Sanders, 2012).<sup>1</sup> However, reviews suggest that evidence from epidemiological studies is inconsistent and causal links are hard to identify (Šrám et al., 2005; Bosetti et al., 2010).

In a separate line of research, economists have capitalized on novel natural experiments to come closer to estimating causal effects of air pollution during the prenatal period on infant health. For example, Jayachandran (2009) and Rangel and Vogl (2019) exploit incidents of natural fire or biomass fire and wind direction to identify the effect of air pollution exposure on birth outcomes in Indonesia and Brazil. Currie and Walker (2011) exploit the introduction of electronic toll collection in the US and show reduced traffic pollution brought by electronic toll collection reduced prematurity and low birthweight among mothers within two kilometers of a toll plaza relative to mothers two to ten kilometers away. Luechinger (2014) exploits mandated desulfurization at power plants and prevailing wind directions to study the effects on infant mortality in Germany.<sup>2</sup>

Our paper follows this strand of literature by exploiting an international sports event: the 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games, during which air quality was exogenously improved.

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<sup>1</sup> Mechanisms of air pollution effects on fetal development have been studied in animal models. For example, prenatal exposure to  $SO_2$  leads to developmental and functional toxicities;  $NO_2$  suppresses antioxidant defense systems;  $CO$  interferes with oxygen delivery to fetuses by displacement of oxygen from hemoglobin; and early fetal exposure to  $PM$  can alter trophoblast formation and vascularization of the placenta (Shah, Balkhair and Knowledge Synthesis Group on Determinants of Preterm/LBW births, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> See Currie et al. (2014) for a review of earlier studies.

We estimate, for the first time to our knowledge, its impact on birth outcomes in South China. Specifically, assuming 39 weeks of gestation, we use the time during pregnancy that overlapped with the Asian Games as an instrumental variable to identify exogenous variation in air pollution exposure and estimate the causal impacts on birth outcomes in response to such an exogenous change. Our approach is also novel in assessing heterogeneity in the causal impact of air pollution on birth outcomes by child sex and by maternal age group.

This paper is structured as follows. In Section 2, we summarize several issues commonly seen in the literature on air pollution and birth outcomes. In Section 3, we describe the air quality regulations implemented before and during the 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games. We introduce the data we use and measurements of air pollution and weather exposures in Section 4. The empirical methods and main results are presented in Sections 5 and 6, respectively. Section 7 examines heterogeneity of effects by child sex and maternal age. Section 8 provides discussion and conclusions.

## 2 Background and Research Objectives

A deterioration in China's air quality since 1990s and increased public availability of air quality data since 2014 have prompted a proliferation of research on the health effects of air pollution (Dong et al., 2013; Guan et al., 2016), including studies on air pollution and fetal growth and pregnancy outcomes (Qian et al., 2016; Zhu et al., 2017; Fu et al., 2019). Much of this literature studied associations between air pollution and birth outcomes, including infant mortality, low birthweight and prematurity risk. However, most existing studies using individual birth information from China have suffered from one or more of the following three limitations.

First, most of these studies use individual-level birth data from a single city within a relatively short time period—two to three years.<sup>3</sup> But multi-city and multi-year studies have statistical power advantages (Ito, Thurston and Silverman, 2007). In the single-city design, moreover, it is difficult to disentangle air pollution from meteorological factors as they usually co-vary and both can have impacts on birth outcomes. Multi-city samples with bigger variation in both air pollution and weather therefore have advantages because different cities usually have different compositions of air pollution and patterns of interactions between air

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<sup>3</sup> Two recent papers from China are exceptions: Sun et al. (2019) covers all of Zhejiang province but however fails to control for weather and Liu et al. (2019) covers the whole Guangdong Province.

pollution and weather.

Second, most epidemiological studies fail to consider pregnancy timing and self-selection of residence. Pregnancy timing, either conscious or unconscious, is a significant phenomenon in many parts of the world. For example, using China's Fifth National Population Census, Yang (2021) finds there is a salient peak of birth numbers in October, which is mainly driven by labor migrants who often get married and conceive in the Chinese New Year Period (usually between late January and mid February). Since labor migrants on average have lower educational level than nonmigrants, *ceteris paribus*, failing to consider pregnant population composition changes across time in a year by controlling for maternal education could potentially bias the estimates of air pollution. However, in a recent review, only 7 out of 25 studies on air pollution and birth outcomes in China control for maternal education (Jacobs et al., 2017).

Third, most papers have ignored possible important heterogeneities in the results. For example, DiPietro and Voegtline (2017) review converging evidence that suggests that infant and early childhood developmental outcomes of male fetuses exposed to prenatal adversities are more highly impaired than those of female fetuses. Although there is some evidence to suggest that the effect of air pollution differs by sex of the child (Ghosh et al., 2007), there have been few studies on China that examine this possibility. Similarly, an associational study in Wuxi, China provided evidence of a stronger association of  $PM_{10}$  with preterm birth among those with advanced maternal age (Han et al., 2018), but we have not found studies using a causal design to address maternal age-related heterogeneities in effects of air pollution on birth outcomes in China.

In this paper, we estimate the effects of prenatal air pollution on birth outcomes by 1) using unique birth-certificate data from two cities in South China that are similar in climate and social and economic development, but different in pollution levels; 2) addressing the issue of pregnancy timing and self selection by exploiting the exogenous improvement of air quality during the Guangzhou 2010 Asian Games and controlling for quarterly trends in birth outcomes; and, 3) examining the heterogeneity of the effects across child sex and maternal age groups. Given high-frequency daily air pollution level data, and properly controlled seasonal trends, our strategy exploits variation in the timing of conception within the same season, and compares the birth outcomes in Guangzhou, where air quality was significantly improved during the Asian Games, with those in Shenzhen. Although the city of Shenzhen was also

in the area of regional air quality control during the Asian Games, we will show below that pollutant concentrations were significantly reduced in Guangzhou relative to Shenzhen during the Asian Games.

Our methodology is superior to much of the prior literature in that it not only addresses self-selection endogeneity bias – the problem that individuals choose where to live based on their health preferences and other observed characteristics – but also provides a way to disentangle the impacts of air pollution from weather, as air quality was exogenously improved during the Asian Games by stringent air quality control policies. Exploiting exogenous air quality improvement during a large sports event to study its health impact does have precedent in the literature. For example, [Rich et al. \(2015\)](#) exploited the natural experiment of air pollution decline during the Beijing Olympics to evaluate whether having specific months of pregnancy overlap with the 2008 Beijing Olympics was associated with larger birthweights, using individual data on term births, compared with pregnancies during the same dates in 2007 or 2009. However, there is no control city in the sample. In addition, exploiting the same 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, [He, Fan and Zhou \(2016\)](#) analyzed monthly mortality data from nationally-representative surveillance points to estimate the effect of air pollution on mortality in China.

### **3 Air Quality Regulations Related to the 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games**

The 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games were the second Asian Games held in China, after the 1990 Beijing Asian Games. To prepare for the Asian Games, the Guangdong government adopted systematic, multi-stage improvement measures and implemented a series of regulations on air quality control starting with the announcement in 2004 of Guangzhou as the host city for the 16th Asian Games. Since Beijing had successfully hosted the Olympics in 2008, the Guangdong government learned a great deal from the Beijing government's experiences with air quality control, especially with regard to regional cooperation and multi-city control actions.

The key area targeted for air quality improvement included the Pearl River Delta Metropolitan Region (PRD), where the cities of Guangzhou and Shenzhen are situated. The straight line distance between the two cities is about 100km. Although this regional air pollution



management strategy may have improved Shenzhen's air quality during the same period, we later will show that relative to Shenzhen, air quality in Guangzhou was improved significantly during the Asian Games. On February 24, 2010, the Guangdong Province Environment Protection Department issued the "Notice on Air Quality Regulations during the Pre-Asian Games Period" (Department of Environmental Protection of Guangdong Government, 2010). It lists a series of measures for quality control during the last year before the Asian Games, for example, installation of desulfurization and denitrification by Guangzhou Papermaking Plant and power plants and converting to clean fuels from coal furnaces by Guangzhou Steel Company. Low-steam-capacity industrial boilers were required to be phased out, all gas stations, oil depots and oil tankers were required to complete oil and gas recovery management, volatile organic compounds (VOCs) related industries were required to reduce emissions, and the building materials industry was required to phase out low-capacity facilities and to install dust removal and denitrification facilities and meet emission requirements. As part of regional air quality control measures, PRD cities were required to set up complete vehicle emissions inspection systems and monitoring and data-sharing networks, and upgrade the quality standard of gasoline for motor vehicles. It also sets up ambient air quality monitoring and surveillance mechanism in PRD cities.

While the previous measures were taken steadily and progressively, the most strict control measures were implemented during the Asian Games period (i.e., between October 20, 2010 and December 20, 2010) – the period on which we are focusing.<sup>4</sup> These measures involved temporary production shutdowns for plants that did not meet emission standard and traffic controls.<sup>5</sup> Efforts were made to make sure concentrations of  $SO_2$ ,  $NO_2$  and  $PM_{10}$  were lower than National Standard Grade 2 levels.

All of these regulations were strictly binding. Non-compliers faced the risk of temporary shutdown as punishment during the two-month Asian Games. As a result, air pollutant levels dropped significantly during the two months of the Guangzhou Asian Games (Liu et al., 2013; Xu et al., 2013). According to Liu et al. (2013), the Asian Games abatement strategy reduced emissions by 41.1% for  $SO_2$ , 41.9% for  $NO_x$ , 26.5% for  $PM_{10}$ , 25.8% for  $PM_{2.5}$ , and 39.7% for

<sup>4</sup> The Asian Games were held between November 1, 2010 and December 20, 2010. Because the strict measures were taken starting on October 20, 2010, we define the Asian Games Air Pollution Control period as October 20 - December 20, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Similar trends were observed in lockdown periods during the Covid-19 Pandemic, in which most affected countries adopted partial or complete lockdown policies. As a result, air quality largely improved (National Aeronautics and Space Administration, U.S.A., 2020).

VOC. The concentrations of  $SO_2$ ,  $NO_2$ ,  $PM_{10}$  and  $PM_{2.5}$  were reduced by 66.8%, 51.3%, 21.5% and 17.1%, respectively.

## 4 Data

### 4.1 Data on Birth Outcomes

We use birth-certificate data collected by one of the authors from one district in the city of Guangzhou and all of the city of Shenzhen for the period between January 2009 and February 2012. The birth-certificate data cover all births during the period in these districts and cities as required by law. All locations report basic birth outcomes including estimated gestational age based on reported last menstrual period, birthweight, birth length, sex, and parity, as well as maternal age and education.<sup>6</sup> Neither of these locations reported maternal height and marital status<sup>7</sup> in their birth-certificate systems. We focus on three outcomes: prematurity (defined as gestational age at birth less than 37 weeks), birthweight, and low birthweight (defined as birthweight less than 2500g). Table A1 lists the basic statistics of these outcomes by city.

We only include singleton live births in our sample (819,619). We exclude observations with less than 28 weeks or above 46 weeks of gestational age or with missing information on gestational age (1553 observations dropped), with birthweight less than 500g (51 observations dropped) or birth length less than 28cm or longer than 100cm (13 observations dropped). We further drop those with maternal age under 15 (927 observations dropped) or above 60 years old (5 observations dropped). To avoid fixed cohort bias,<sup>8</sup> we delete births within this period with conception dates earlier than 18 June 2008 and those with conception dates later than 13 April 2011 (as gestational age varies between 196 and 322 days in the sample), which leaves 545,703 observations. We further drop 23000 observations that do not have any of the following information: birthweight, gestational age at birth, gender of the baby, maternal age, maternal education or parity. In the end, 129,131 , 183,959 , 201,889, and 7,724 birth observations from 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, respectively, constitute the main sample for

<sup>6</sup> Although maternal job information is also available in both cities, 40% observations in Shenzhen sample has missing values. As there was no uniform birth certificate in the region at that time, maternal job categories were not collected in a consistent way in these two cities. We have tried to aggregate jobs into broad, comparable categories and include them in robustness checks in Appendix 2.

<sup>7</sup> Children born to single mothers are not culturally acceptable in China and are rare.

<sup>8</sup> Fixed cohort bias emerges when a sample consists of births during a fixed period—this approach will include only the longer pregnancies at the start of the study and only the shorter pregnancies at the end of the study. This has the potential to bias studies of environmental exposures (Strand, Barnett and Tong, 2011).

analysis.

The distribution of the number of births throughout a year in this data (as shown in Figure A3) is consistent with the observation of Yang (2021) using national census data that the peak of number of births is in October, when those who get married during the Chinese New Year are most likely to give birth. Labor migrants may be most likely to show this pattern. Birthweight also shows strong seasonality in this sample, as shown in Figure A1. Shenzhen has higher average birthweight than Guangzhou throughout the year. The two cities show very similar seasonality trends: children born in the summer have higher birthweight than those born in the winter. These similar patterns help validate Shenzhen as a control city.

## 4.2 Data on Air Pollution and Weather

The data on air pollution come from the Guangzhou and Shenzhen environmental bureaus that report the daily average levels of three monitored air pollutants ( $NO_2$ ,  $PM_{10}$ ,  $SO_2$ ) at all monitoring stations in each city during 2008 to 2012. These pollutants are measured according to the National Standard GB3095—1996. For the very few missing observations in our data, we replace them with moving averages for the most recent 5 days. Data such as these are very rare in China for the period under study, as China only published an air pollution index (API) before 2014 and individual pollutant levels were generally not publicly available. As the API is an index score based on the most dominant pollutant, using the API alone does not reveal information on all “criteria” pollutants.

Figure A2 shows the daily average levels of the three air pollutants over the duration of the study period. Three patterns merit note. First, Guangzhou and Shenzhen have different compositions of air pollutants and air quality in Shenzhen is on average better than Guangzhou. Second, in general, air pollution is worse in the winter than in the summer in both cities. The average levels of  $NO_2$ ,  $PM_{10}$ ,  $SO_2$  in Guangzhou are 52.22, 92,  $35\mu g/m^3$  in November - January, compared to 27.91, 52.56,  $32.21\mu g/m^3$  in June - August. Third,  $SO_2$  shows a decreasing trend throughout the entire period (conditional on season), which is consistent with the ongoing desulfurization effort by the Guangdong government during the last decade.

Guangzhou and Shenzhen have typical subtropical climates, with very mild winters and hot, rainy and humid summers due to the Asian monsoon. The temperature throughout the year varies between  $11^\circ C$  and  $33^\circ C$ . Rainfall is abundant, at around 1700 millimeters a year, concentrated from May to September. We obtain hourly data on temperatures and dew points

at two meters above sea-level as well as precipitation from reanalysis data at single levels by the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts ([European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts](#) , [ECMWF](#)) for both cities for the period between January 1, 2008 and February 29, 2012 and calculate the daily mean temperature and daily mean relative humidity and 24-hr precipitation.<sup>9</sup> We also obtain the universal thermal climate indices (UTCI) from the same source. The UTCI, a thermal comfort indicator based on human heat-balance models, is designed to be applicable in all seasons and climates and for all spatial and temporal scales ([European Centre for Medium-range Weather Forecasts](#) , [ECMWF](#)). The UTCI is a one-dimensional index that reflects “the human physiological reaction to the multidimensionally defined actual outdoor thermal environment” ([Bröde et al., 2012](#), p.2). Scores can be classified into ten thermal stress categories, ranging from extreme cold stress to extreme heat stress ([European Centre for Medium-range Weather Forecasts](#) , [ECMWF](#)). In a subtropical, humid environment such as Guangzhou and Shenzhen, this index provides a wider range of variation than does ambient temperature.<sup>10</sup> Table [A2](#) lists the distribution statistics of UTCI in both cities between 2000 and 2008, which serves as the reference period based on which we define extreme weather in section [4.4](#).

### 4.3 Prenatal Air Pollution Exposure Measurement

Due to data constraints, we only know individuals’ cities of residence but not their home addresses. We therefore calculate the daily mean of air pollutants’ levels for each city and assign each individual their accumulative prenatal exposure based on their gestational periods. However, this measure suffers from a potential problem – it generates a spurious inverse correlation between adverse birth outcomes and accumulated air pollution levels because a shorter gestational age implies a shorter third trimester and therefore smaller accumulated air pollution exposure. We avoid this spurious relationship by calculating the daily average exposure level (i.e. dividing the accumulated exposure by the number of days of gestational age).

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<sup>9</sup> We calculate relative humidity (*rh*) by  $rh = \exp(5423 * ((1/273) - (1/d2m))) / \exp(5423 * ((1/273) - (1/t2m)))$ , where *d2m* is 2-meter above sea level dew point, and *t2m* is 2-meter above sea level temperature.

<sup>10</sup>We provide details on how we acquire and process UTCI data in [Liu et al. \(2021\)](#).

## 4.4 Extreme Weather Exposure Measurement

Besides air pollutants, weather conditions such as temperature and humidity have been shown to be related with birth outcomes (Beltran, Wu and Laurent, 2014; He et al., 2016; Murray et al., 2000; Siniarska and Koziel, 2010). In this paper, we control for weather with two different specifications. In one specification, we control for daily mean average temperature and relative humidity during pregnancy. In the other specification, we use the universal thermal climate indices (UTCI) to define extreme cold and extreme hot weather in order to control for the possible effects of extreme temperatures on both ends. More specifically, we define extreme cold days as the daily mean UTCI below  $0^{\circ}\text{C}$ , and extreme hot days as the daily mean UTCI above  $34^{\circ}\text{C}$ .<sup>11</sup> It can be seen that UTCI has a larger variance than ambient temperature and is more likely to fall into extreme temperature ranges. We calculate the percentage of time during pregnancy exposed to extreme cold (number of days with the daily lowest apparent temperature under  $0^{\circ}\text{C}$  divided by the number of pregnancy days) and extreme heat (number of days with the daily highest apparent temperature over  $34^{\circ}\text{C}$  divided by the number of pregnancy days) for each pregnancy and use these two variables to control for extreme weather conditions.<sup>12</sup>

## 5 Methods

First, to investigate whether Guangzhou air quality was significantly improved relative to Shenzhen during the Asian Games, we run the following difference-in-difference regression with daily monitored air pollutants levels data from monitoring stations as well as meteorological data:

$$P_{yds} = a * AsianGames_{yd} + b * Guangzhou + c * Guangzhou * AsianGames_{yd} + y + d + dow + spline(temp, df = 3) + spline(rainfall, df = 3) + u_{yds} \quad (1)$$

$P_{yds}$  is the level of air pollutant  $P$  on date  $d$  in year  $y$  at monitoring site  $s$ . We model it as a function of year fixed effects  $y$ , date-in-a-year fixed effects  $d$ , day-of-week fixed effect  $dow$ ,

<sup>11</sup>The reason that we use  $0^{\circ}\text{C}$  and  $34^{\circ}\text{C}$  as cutoffs to define extreme cold and hot is because these two cutoffs are close to the bottom 1% and top 1% of historical UTCI data of both cities between 2000 and 2008 as shown in Table A2.

<sup>12</sup>We don't use the absolute number of days being extreme cold or hot in regressions due to the inverse causality concern already discussed.

city fixed effects *Guangzhou*, and spline functions of observed daily mean temperature and rainfall each with 3 degrees of freedom, as well as an error term  $u_{yds}$ . We define  $AsianGames_{yd}$  as a binary variable equal to 1 if year  $y$  is 2010 and date  $d$  is between October 20th and December 20th. This term estimates the average change in the air pollutant in both cities during the Asian Games. Parameter  $c$  is the coefficient of interest, which estimates the effect of the Asian Games on air quality in Guangzhou city during the Asian Games, which is in addition to the average effect in both cities.

Next, we estimate the effects of air pollution on birth outcomes. Observed associations between air pollution and birth outcomes may suffer from two types of bias that work in opposite directions: 1) attenuation bias caused by measurement error of exposure level as we do not have accurate information on where in the cities people spent their time; 2) location selection bias as people with more resources (and perhaps, better health) may choose in what city to live in part according to air quality, which could cause overestimation of the causal relationship between air pollution and birth outcomes. As these two types of biases work in opposite direction, it is hard to predict the direction of bias in the aggregate. We address this issue by exploiting the exogenous air quality improvement during the Guangzhou Asian Games and treat the event as a “quasi-experiment” that indirectly affected birth outcomes through air quality improvements. Thus, the methodology we undertake to identify the causal impacts of air pollution on adverse birth outcomes is to use Asian Games exposure as an instrument for prenatal air pollution exposure. The estimated effect is the Local Average Treatment Effect on the Treated (LATE). More specifically, we estimate the correlation between birth outcomes and individual prenatal air pollution exposure, with the number of days overlapping between a woman’s pregnancy and the air quality control period for the Asian Games as an instrumental variable that brings about the exogenous change. The empirical framework is described in Equations (2) and (3).

$$P_i = \sigma X_i + \rho M_i + \gamma * 1(c_i = "Guangzhou") * G_i + y_i + q_i * c_i + c_i + \epsilon_i \quad (2)$$

$$Y_{icyq} = \alpha X_i + \theta P_i + \beta M_i + y_i + q_i * c_i + c_i + u_i \quad (3)$$

Eq.(2) is the first-stage estimation of pregnant woman  $i$ ’s pollution exposure  $P_i$ , as a function of individual characteristics  $X_i$ , meteorological conditions  $M_i$  during pregnancy, as well as a policy exposure term  $\gamma * 1(c_i = "Guangzhou") * G_i$ , where,  $G_i$  is pregnant woman  $i$ ’s time exposed to the Asian Games during pregnancy. Both functions control for conception-year

fixed effects  $y_i$ , city-specific conception-quarter<sup>13</sup> fixed effects  $q_i * c_i$  and city fixed effects  $c_i$ .

Eq. (3) is the outcome estimation, in which  $Y_{icyq}$  is the birth outcome variable of individual  $i$  from city  $c$  conceived in year  $y$  and quarter  $q$ . The birth outcome can be a continuous variable – birthweight, or a binary variable – low birthweight or prematurity. The birth outcome is a function of individual-specific characteristics ( $X$ ) such as maternal age and education and parity, environmental exposure including prenatal exposure to ambient air pollution ( $P$ ) and meteorological conditions ( $M$ ).

We consider two candidates for  $G_i$ : 1) a continuous variable measuring how many days one’s pregnancy duration overlapped with the Asian Games. 2) a continuous variable measuring how many days one’s *expected* pregnancy duration overlapped with the Asian Games, by assuming everyone has 39 weeks of gestation. We argue the first of these is not a valid instrument because one is likely to have more overlap with Asian Games if one has longer gestation given the same gestational date. Therefore this variable may not satisfy the exclusion restriction because it is correlated with outcome variables not only through air pollution exposure. In contrast, the second instrumental variable candidate simply exploits the variation in timing of conception and its exogenous co-variance with the timing of Asian Games to instrument for variation in exposure. This instrumental variable satisfies the exclusion restriction if we believe that individual’s timing of conception was not affected by the Asian Games, conditional on conception quarter-in-a-year fixed effects. Our following analysis adopts the second instrumental variable.

Besides pollution and weather, we also control for conception-year fixed effects  $y_i$  and a city-specific conception quarter-in-a-year effect  $q_i * c_i$  to control for city-specific seasonal patterns and the possible weather preference that may introduce selection bias. This city-specific quarter-in-a-year effects term controls for all unobserved time-varying city fixed effects, including population composition change due to pregnancy timing and the common shocks to birth outcomes experienced by individuals who conceived in the same season of a year within the same city<sup>14</sup>. The reason for controlling for conception quarter-in-a-year trends instead of month trends of birth outcomes in our study is that the instrumental variable we

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<sup>13</sup>We define quarter based on local climate: quarter 1 - spring: March-May, quarter 2 - summer: June-August, quarter 3 - autumn: September - November, quarter 4 - winter: December - February.

<sup>14</sup>In more recent papers examining environment on birth outcomes, some studies control for quarterly trends (Wang et al., 2021), or monthly trends in a year (He et al., 2016), or even day-in-a-year trends (Chen et al., 2020). Since air pollution also varies across time in a year, there could be a tradeoff between under-control and over-control of these trends.

use is defined based on city and timing of conception (basically covering November and December of 2010), i.e., the exogenous variation in exposure variable comes from interaction between a city fixed effect and conception month fixed effect. Controlling for month trends in birth outcomes likely would cause collinearity with this variation and therefore over-control the model. Note that with fixed effects rather than only random effects, the other types of shocks that may also affect birth outcomes (such as typhoons) are allowed to be correlated with the right-side variables, including air pollution and weather.  $u_i$  is the error term that represents the effects of random unobserved factors and measurement error. As we have controlled for year fixed effects and city-specific conception quarter-in-a-year fixed effects, we assume  $u_i$  is independent and identically distributed (i.i.d.). In regression results, we report heteroscedasticity-consistent or robust standard errors.

## 6 Results

### 6.1 Effects of Asian Games on Air Pollution Reduction

Our first set of results in regressions of daily monitored level of each pollutant between 2008 and 2012 show that during the Asian Games, the three air pollutants' levels were significantly reduced in Guangzhou. The coefficients on  $1.Guangzhou * 1.policy$  in Table 1 correspond to coefficient  $c$  in Equation 1, i.e., the coefficient of interest. As shown in the first panel, Column (1)-(3), after controlling for meteorological conditions including temperature and rainfall, city fixed effects, year fixed effects and day-in-a-year fixed effects, we find  $PM_{10}$ ,  $NO_2$  and  $SO_2$  in Guangzhou were significantly reduced during the Asian Games compared to the same period in 2009 and 2011. More specifically, compared to Shenzhen, Guangzhou witnessed a further reduction of  $PM_{10}$  by  $33.91 \mu g/m^3$  (s.d.=6.44),  $SO_2$  by  $8.24 \mu g/m^3$  (s.d.=2.45) and  $NO_2$  by  $24.64 \mu g/m^3$  (s.d.=4.62).

We also implemented placebo tests that defined three imaginary, alternative dates for the Asian Games: 1) one year before (Scenario A.  $Policy = [20Oct2009 - 20Dec2009]$ ), 2) one year after (Scenario B.  $Policy = [20Oct2011 - 20Dec2011]$ ), 3) five months before (Scenario C.  $Policy = [20May2010 - 20Jul2010]$ ). The significant positive coefficients on  $Guangzhou * policy$  term in Placebo Test Scenario A implies air pollutant levels in Guangzhou in 2009 were significantly higher than in the same period in 2010 and 2011, compared to the control city Shenzhen. In Placebo Test Scenario B, we find  $PM_{10}$  and  $NO_2$  are reduced in both



Guangzhou and Shenzhen in 2011 compared to 2009 and 2010, while  $SO_2$  is more reduced in Guangzhou compared to Shenzhen between 20 October and 20 December in 2011, thanks to persistent effort of desulphurisation by Guangzhou government. In Placebo Test Scenario C, we do not see significant differences in air pollutants' levels between May and July in 2010 compared to other years between two cities. These placebo tests lay the foundation for our estimation strategy below of using the overlap period between pregnancy and the Asian Games to instrument for one's prenatal air pollution exposure.

## 6.2 Effects of Air Pollution on Birth Outcomes

We estimate Equations (2) & (3) with a linear continuous model for birthweight and probit models for low birthweight and preterm birth using the two-stage least squares method (2SLS and IV-Probit separately). Due to high correlations among pollutants, we estimate the equation with each pollutant separately.

As mentioned in Section 5, we use number of days overlapped between *expected* pregnancy (by assuming each has 39 weeks of pregnancy) and the Asian Games to instrument for the exposure measurement. Consistent with difference-in-difference estimation results on air quality improvement during Asian Games, the first-stage results (Table A3) show the instrument is highly significantly correlated with all three air pollutant exposures. One more day of overlap of pregnancy with the Asian Games period reduces daily average exposure to  $PM_{10}$ ,  $NO_2$  and  $SO_2$  by 0.16, 0.26, 0.13  $\mu g/m^3$  respectively, in the specification with linear control of temperature and relative humidity. The results are similar in the other specification with extreme temperatures as weather control.

Marginal effects of  $PM_{10}$  exposure on birth outcomes are presented in Table 2. For comparison, we present results of OLS or probit in the left 6 columns ((1)-(6)), while the right 6 columns (7) to (12) are for 2SLS or IV-probit. Specifications A and B vary by the weather controls. Specification A controls for daily mean temperature and relative humidity over one's pregnancy, while specification B controls for percentage of time during pregnancy that a woman was exposed to extreme temperatures, defined by UTCI.

Although the effects of  $PM_{10}$  on mean birthweights are similar between OLS and IV estimates, the marginal effects of  $PM_{10}$  on the risk of low birthweight and preterm are much smaller with IV, nearly half of the size of those without IV, given the same specification. With IV estimates, a 10  $\mu g/m^3$  increase in  $PM_{10}$  reduces birthweight by around 14 grams, and in-

Table 1: Difference-in-Difference Estimation of Effects on Air Pollution of Asian Games

VARIABLES	I. Real Policy Effect (Policy = [20Oct2010 - 20Dec2010])			II. Placebo Test Scenario A (Policy = [20Oct2009-20Dec2009])			III. Placebo Test Scenario B (Policy = [20Oct2011-20Dec2011])			IV. Placebo Test Scenario C (Policy = [20May2010-20Jul2020])		
	(1) $PM_{10}$	(2) $SO_2$	(3) $NO_2$	(4) $PM_{10}$	(5) $SO_2$	(6) $NO_2$	(7) $PM_{10}$	(8) $SO_2$	(9) $NO_2$	(10) $PM_{10}$	(11) $SO_2$	(12) $NO_2$
1.policy	15.77*** (5.138)	0.927 (1.954)	5.500 (3.688)	0.599 (5.170)	2.843 (1.959)	0.299 (3.699)	-12.34** (5.179)	2.289 (1.965)	-7.299** (3.718)	4.892 (4.378)	1.366 (1.663)	3.456 (3.148)
1.Guangzhou*1.policy	-33.91*** (6.441)	-8.244*** (2.450)	-24.64*** (4.624)	13.64** (6.463)	5.502** (2.448)	20.64*** (4.624)	7.106 (6.479)	-6.733*** (2.458)	-4.040 (4.652)	4.177 (5.365)	-2.815 (2.037)	-4.190 (3.858)
Observations	4576	4576	4576	4576	4576	4576	4576	4576	4576	4576	4576	4576
R-squared	0.457	0.595	0.476	0.452	0.597	0.483	0.453	0.594	0.472	0.452	0.593	0.472

Notes: Estimation of Daily air pollutant level from all monitoring stations in Guangzhou and Shenzhen city between 2008 and 2012. All specifications include Year FE, City FE, Day in a Year FE. Justified models also justify meteorological variables including temperature and rainfall. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* significant at 1%, \*\* significant at 5%, \*significant at 10%.

Table 2: Marginal Effects of  $PM_{10}$  (by  $10 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ) on the Probability of Low Birthweight, Mean Birthweight and Risk of Preterm.

VARIABLES	Probit Model/OLS Model						IV-Probit Model/zSLS Model					
	Low Birthweight	Birthweight	Preterm	Low Birthweight	Birthweight	Preterm	Low Birthweight	Birthweight	Preterm	Low Birthweight	Birthweight	Preterm
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
$PM_{10} * 10\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$	0.007*** (0.001)	0.006*** (0.001)	-16.37*** (2.60)	-13.70*** (2.31)	0.012*** (0.001)	0.009*** (0.001)	0.0033* (0.002)	0.0022 (0.002)	-14.18*** (4.97)	-13.39*** (5.20)	0.0065*** (0.002)	0.0045** (0.002)
Temp. (°C)	-0.0038*** (0.000)	10.59*** (0.948)	-0.0044 *** (0.000)	-0.0044 *** (0.000)	-0.0044 *** (0.000)	-0.0044 *** (0.000)	-0.0041*** (0.000)	10.76*** (1.01)	10.76*** (1.01)	10.76*** (1.01)	-0.0048*** (0.000)	-0.0048*** (0.000)
Rel. hum. (%)	0.0015*** (0.000)	-3.83*** (0.44)	0.0023*** (0.000)	0.0023*** (0.000)	0.0023*** (0.000)	0.0023*** (0.000)	0.0012*** (0.000)	0.0012*** (0.000)	-3.63*** (0.59)	-3.63*** (0.59)	0.0017*** (0.000)	0.0017*** (0.000)
Ext. cold (%)	0.0023*** (0.001)	0.0023*** (0.001)	-6.41*** (1.25)	-6.41*** (1.25)	0.0032*** (0.001)	0.0032*** (0.001)	0.0032*** (0.001)	0.002*** (0.001)	-6.39*** (1.30)	-6.39*** (1.30)	0.0028*** (0.001)	0.0028*** (0.001)
Ext. hot (%)	0.0003 (0.000)	0.0003 (0.000)	-0.095 (1.15)	-0.095 (1.15)	0.0007 (0.001)	0.0007 (0.001)	0.0007 (0.001)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.10 (1.16)	-0.10 (1.16)	0.00086 (0.001)	0.00086 (0.001)
Obs.	A			B			A			B		
Spec.	A			B			A			B		

Notes: Each column represents a separate regression. (1)-(6) are from Probit/OLS regressions without applying IV, while (7)-(12) are from IV-Probit/zSLS regressions. (1),(2),(5),(6),(7),(8),(11),(12) are marginal effects of  $10 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3 PM_{10}$  on the probability of Low Birthweight and Preterm at the mean values of all control variables. (3),(4),(9),(10) are marginal effects of  $10\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3 PM_{10}$  on Mean Birthweight. Control variables include parity, sex of the baby, quadratic function of maternal age, maternal education categories, conception year fixed effects, city-specific conception season fixed effects and weather variables. Specification A and B vary with the weather variables. Specification A controls for linear terms of mean temperature and relative humidity during one's pregnancy, while specification B controls for the percentage of pregnancy exposed to extreme cold and hot defined by UTCI. \*\*\* significant at 1%, \*\* significant at 5%, \* significant at 10%. Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

creases the risk of preterm by 0.45% to 0.65%, while the effect on the risk of low birthweight is not statistically significant in a specification controlling for extreme temperatures, and only weakly significantly increases low birthweight by 0.3% in the specification controlling for linear temperature and relative humidity.

Results for the other two pollutants,  $NO_2$  and  $SO_2$ , are presented in Tables A4 and A5 in the Appendix. The effects of  $SO_2$  are strongest: a  $10 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  increase in  $SO_2$  reduces average birthweight by 18 to 20 grams, and increases the preterm rate by around 0.76 to 0.83%. Among the three pollutants,  $NO_2$  shows the smallest effects:  $10 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  increases in  $NO_2$  reduce average birthweight by 8.7 to 9.3 grams, and increase the preterm rate by 0.33 to 0.38%.

### 6.3 Estimation Results by Trimester

To test the sensitivity of effects within various subperiods of pregnancy, we also estimate the impacts of each pollutant by trimester, with the coefficients displayed in Table 3. Each column represents results from a regression, i.e., different pollutants enter different regressions, while the exposure to the three trimesters are from the same regression. It is clear that third trimester exposure to  $PM_{10}$  plays the key role in reducing average birthweight. A  $10 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  increase in  $PM_{10}$  in the third trimester decreases average birthweight by 13-15 grams, while exposure in the first and second trimester don't have significant effects on birthweight. The most sensitive trimester to  $PM_{10}$  in terms of preterm risk depends on the weather control: in specification A with linear control of mean temperature and humidity, the third trimester is most sensitive to  $PM_{10}$ , while in specification B with extreme temperature defined by UTCI, the second trimester is the only sensitive period. The statistical significance is much lower for the preterm risk outcome. The estimated effects of  $SO_2$  and  $NO_2$  by trimester do not show sensitive periods, although three trimesters combined have significant effects on birthweight and preterm. To save space, the estimated coefficients are not displayed, but are available by request.

## 7 Heterogeneity of Effects by Sex and Maternal Age

Previous research shows evidence of gender/sex differences in response to environmental exposures (Keitt, Fagan and Marts, 2004; Clougherty, 2010; Kim et al., 2017). To test the

Table 3: Marginal Effects of Prenatal Exposure to  $PM_{10}$  on Low Birthweight, Average Birthweight, and Preterm Risk by Trimester

VARIABLES	Low Birthweight		Birthweight		Preterm	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
$PM_{10}$ in the first trimester $\times 10 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$	-0.0003 (0.002)	0.00061 (0.001)	1.63 (3.97)	1.22 (3.76)	0.0002 (0.002)	0.00087 (0.002)
$PM_{10}$ in the second trimester $\times 10 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$	0.001 (0.001)	-0.00033 (0.001)	-0.56 (2.67)	-1.17 (3.30)	0.002 (0.001)	0.0027* (0.001)
$PM_{10}$ in the third trimester $\times 10 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$	0.003 (0.002)	0.002 (0.001)	-15.03*** (4.60)	-13.12*** (3.86)	0.0035* (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)
Weather control	A	B	A	B	A	B
Observations	522,703					

Notes: Each column represents a separate regression. Instrumental variables are a set of variables that measure the percentage of time overlapped with Asian Games period in each trimester. Besides air pollution exposure, other control variables include a binary variable indicating baby is female, parity, quadratic function of maternal age, maternal education categories, conception year fixed effects, city-specific conception season fixed effects. Specification A and B vary with the weather variables. Specification A controls for linear terms of mean temperature and relative humidity during one's pregnancy, while specification B controls for the percentage of pregnancy exposed to extreme cold and hot defined by UTCI. \*\*\* significant at 1%, \*\* significant at 5%, \*significant at 10%. Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

hypothesis that different sexes may have different responses to air pollution in the fetal period, we estimate heterogeneous effects by infants' sex. We do this by adding an interaction term between infant's sex and air pollutant exposure. The estimated coefficients of this interaction term for the three birth outcome variables are shown in the first line in Table 4. Males are more vulnerable to  $PM_{10}$  in terms of average birthweight at a significance level of 10%: on average, males have a 1.51 gram reduction in birthweight in correspondence to a  $1 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  increase in  $PM_{10}$  (i.e., they experience a 15.1 gram extra reduction in birthweight in correspondence to a  $10 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  increase in  $PM_{10}$  compared to female). Nevertheless, males are not more likely than females to experience low birthweight or preterm birth because of air pollution in particular.

The impacts of air pollution may also vary by maternal age. Mothers aged at least 35 deliver babies with lower birthweights – in response to  $10 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  increase in  $PM_{10}$  exposure, lower by 17.3 grams, on average (for both Specification A and B). However, they are not more likely than other mothers to have low birthweight babies nor to have preterm births in response to air pollution.

Table A6 and A7 give the coefficient estimates for interaction terms for  $NO_2$  and  $SO_2$ .  $SO_2$  shows similar interaction term coefficients (males show an 8 more grams reduction in birthweight in response to a  $10 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  increase in  $SO_2$ , and mothers older than 35 years old deliver babies with 22 grams lower birthweight, on average, in response to  $10 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  increase

in  $SO_2$ ). However,  $NO_2$  shows a different pattern. Males do not experience disadvantage, and indeed show an advantage, in birthweight in response to  $NO_2$  exposure (i.e., female fetuses are more vulnerable to  $NO_2$  than are males). But babies of mothers aged over 35 are even more vulnerable than others to  $NO_2$ : they experience 77.6 grams lower birthweights, on average. Neither of these pollutants have sex heterogeneous effects on the risk of low birthweight nor preterm.

## 8 Discussion and Conclusion

This study seeks to provide plausible causal estimates of the impact of prenatal air pollution exposure on birth outcomes by exploiting a large-scale sports event – the Guangzhou 2010 Asian Games – during which air quality control was strictly enforced and air quality was exogenously improved. Using daily air quality data from monitoring stations in Guangzhou and the control city, Shenzhen, we first show that air quality was indeed improved during the Asian Games period in Guangzhou. To demonstrate the improvement, we presented difference-in-difference estimation results and implemented placebo tests by assigning hypothetical alternative counterfactual dates for the Asian Games period. With these findings established, we use the overlap between pregnancy and the actual Asian Games period (given 39 weeks of gestational age) to instrument for ambient air pollution exposure. We find that air pollutants  $PM_{10}$ ,  $NO_2$  and  $SO_2$  significantly decrease birthweights and increase preterm delivery risks.  $10 \mu g/m^3$  increases in  $PM_{10}$ ,  $NO_2$ ,  $SO_2$ , significantly decrease mean birthweight by around 14, 9, and 18-20 grams respectively. The same changes increase preterm risk by 0.45-0.65%, 0.33-0.38% and 0.76-0.83%, respectively. For average birthweight, we also find that the third trimester is an especially vulnerable period for exposure to  $PM_{10}$ .

We compare our findings first with associations summarized in a review of epidemiological studies using Chinese data: [Jacobs et al. \(2017\)](#) summarizes estimates that show a  $10 \mu g/m^3$  increase in  $PM_{10}$  reduces birthweights by 0-9.1 grams. Our estimates on birthweight are of the same order of magnitude but slightly bigger than the findings in these association studies. If we run logit regressions of preterm birth without instrumenting on  $PM_{10}$ , the odds ratio of preterm, 1.027 (s.d.= 0.00283) for specification A, is in the range between 1 and 1.05, as in most epidemiological studies. Nevertheless, the marginal effects on preterm birth are roughly halved in the instrumental variable model, compared to a standard probit model

Table 4: Heterogeneous Effects of  $PM_{10}$  on Birth Outcomes by Sex and Maternal Age Group

VARIABLES	Low Birthweight		Birthweight		Preterm	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
$PM_{10}$ * male	-0.000326 (0.003)	-0.000315 (0.003)	-1.508* (0.772)	-1.506* (0.772)	0.0008897 (0.003)	0.0008034 (0.003)
$PM_{10}$ *(mom age >= 35)	0.000377 (0.000280)	0.000376 (0.000280)	-1.729*** (0.533)	-1.727*** (0.533)	0.000444 (0.000315)	0.000444 (0.000315)
Specification	A	B	A	B	A	B

Notes: IV estimates of the interaction term between  $PM_{10}$  and male or age35+ on birth outcomes, with the same set of control variables as in Table 2. \*\*\* significant at 1%, \*\* significant at 5%, \*significant at 10%.

without instrumenting, and the statistical significance is much weaker for low birthweight. This pattern suggests possible selection bias in the simple association studies of the form that couples who have resources and knowledge to choose lower pollution also have better birth outcomes. The timing of the sensitivity window at the third trimester to  $PM_{10}$  is also consistent with Rich et al. (2015) who find month 8 in pregnancy is the critical window to air pollution.

We next compare our pollution effect estimates to estimates from developed countries, where air pollution is generally lower, in order to illuminate the possible non-linearity of dose-response curves (Fleischer Nancy L. et al., 2014; Arceo, Hanna and Oliva, 2016). There have been a large number of associational studies. For example, Liu et al. (2003) found the risk of preterm delivery was associated with third-trimester exposure to  $SO_2$  (OR=1.09 for 5.0 ppb (or  $13.1 \mu g/m^3$ ) increase, with daily average at  $12.8 \mu g/m^3$  using live birth datasets from Vancouver, Canada. However, causal studies of the impact of air pollution exposure on birthweight and prematurity are limited. Exceptions include Coneus and Spiess (2012), who find no significant effect from  $NO_2$ , or  $SO_2$  in estimates of a mother fixed-effects model using a small sample in Germany<sup>15</sup>, where air quality was much better compared to Guangzhou. Currie, Neidell and Schmieder (2009) also find no effects for  $PM_{10}$  in New Jersey in the United States<sup>16</sup>, where average concentration of  $PM_{10}$  is only about  $30 \mu g/m^3$ —less than half of the average level in our study. Together with the null findings for  $PM_{10}$  and  $NO_2$  in Coneus and Spiess (2012) and Currie, Neidell and Schmieder (2009), the significant findings reported here suggest the possibility that air pollutants at higher concentrations, as in this study, are more likely to cause lower birthweights and prematurity. This contrast across studies with quite different pollution levels suggests the possible existence of threshold or other nonlinear effects of air pollution on birth outcomes.

This study also contributes to a literature on heterogeneous vulnerability to air pollution by maternal age and child sex. In terms of average birthweight, males are more vulnerable to  $PM_{10}$  and  $SO_2$  than are females, but females are more vulnerable to  $NO_2$ . With regard to average birthweight, children of mothers over 35 years old are also more vulnerable than others when exposed to higher levels of all three types of air pollutants.  $NO_2$  brings the

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<sup>15</sup>Coneus and Spiess (2012) find that CO significantly reduces birthweight, but find no significant effects from  $O_3$ ,  $NO_2$  and  $SO_2$ .

<sup>16</sup>Currie, Neidell and Schmieder (2009) finds negative effects of CO on birth outcomes, but no effects for  $O_3$  or  $PM_{10}$ .



strongest harm to babies of mothers over 35 years in comparison with  $SO_2$  and  $PM_{10}$ . We do not find sex and maternal age differences in the effect of air pollution on preterm risk.

In summary, our paper identifies significant impacts of prenatal air pollution exposure on birth outcomes by exploiting a natural experiment – the Asian Games – during which air quality was exogenously improved. This approach is advantageous in addressing self-selection related to exposure and disentangling confounding meteorological factors from air pollution, as the Asian Games event provided an excellent opportunity to observe exogenous change in air pollution but not in weather conditions. Finally, maternal age and child sex differences in vulnerability to air pollution in our findings suggest that these heterogeneities deserve future study.

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## Appendix 1: Tables and Figures



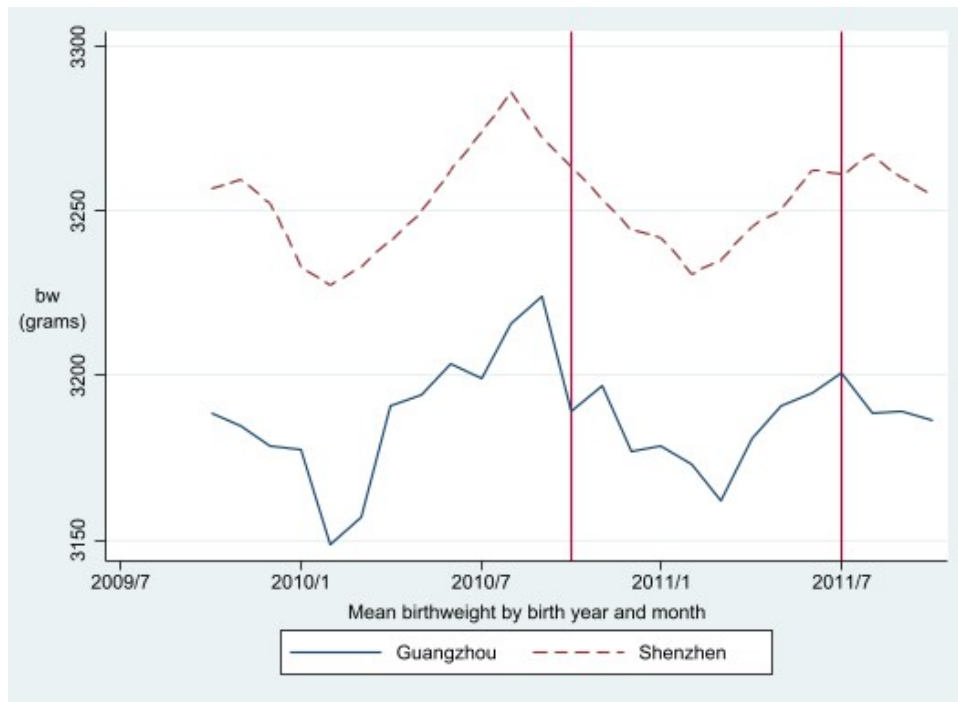


Figure A1: Time Trend of Mean Birthweight by City and Month

Note: Monthly average birth weight is calculated based on birth certificate for each city at each birth month. As Asian Games were held during Oct 01, 2010 and Dec 20, 2010, any births with prenatal periods overlapped with this period (or born between October 2010 and September 2011) are included in the area between the two vertical lines.

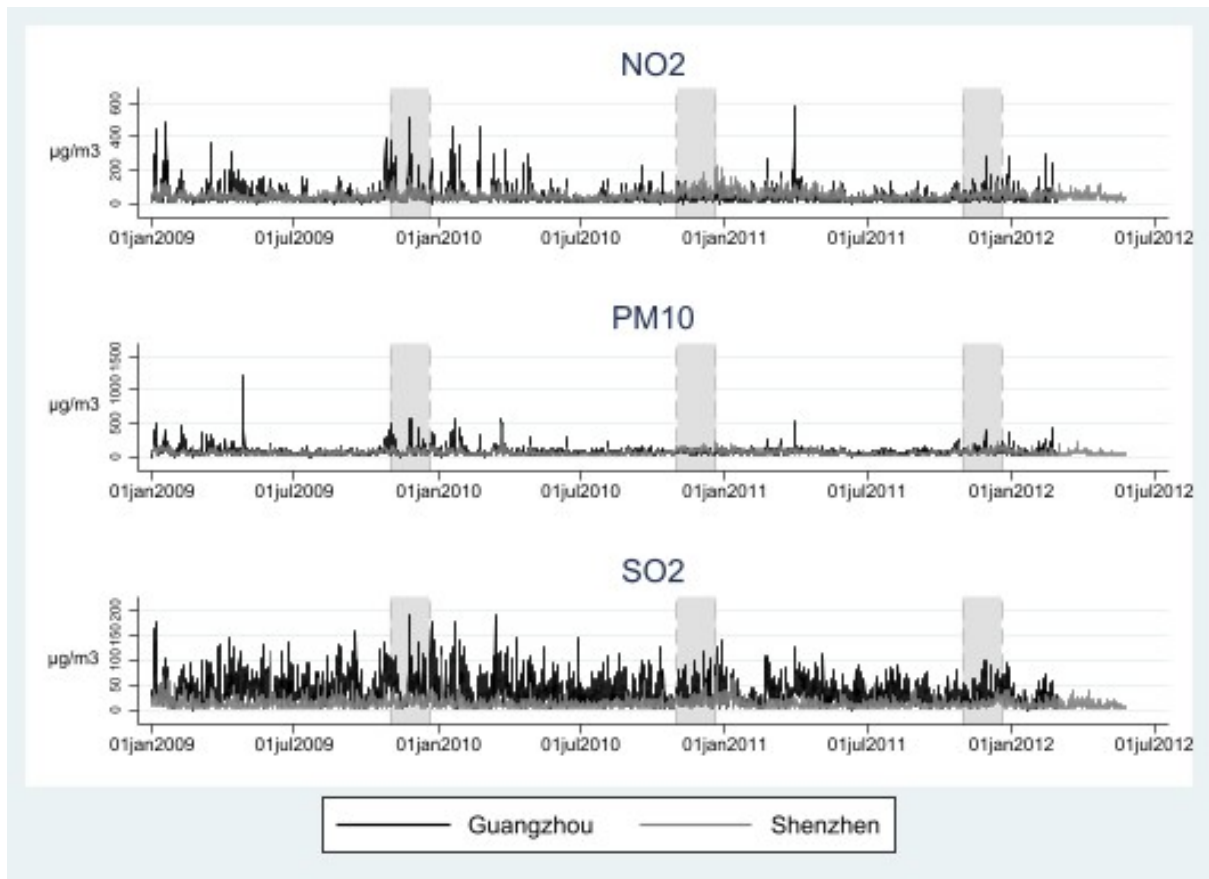


Figure A2: The Daily Concentrations of Three Air Pollutants in Guangzhou and Shenzhen Cities During 2009-2011

Note: The daily concentrations of each pollutant ( $PM_{10}$ ,  $NO_2$  and  $SO_2$  are the average concentration across the whole city. The three periods shaded in grey between two neighboring vertical dashed lines are the same season as the Asian Games in each year, i.e., October 20-December 20 in 2009, 2010, and 2011, separately.



Figure A3: The Number of Live Single Births by Month

Table A1: Study Population Characteristics and Exposure Measurements by City [n (%) or mean(sd)]

	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)
	mean/n	sd/%	mean/n	sd/%	mean/n	sd/%	
Sex (female = 1)	0.46	(0.50)	0.47	(0.50)	0.46	(0.50)	0.57
Preterm	0.05	(0.22)	0.07	(0.26)	0.05	(0.21)	0.00
Birthweight	3240.44	(456.73)	3181.36	(469.68)	3248.15	(454.45)	0.00
Low Birthweight	0.04	(0.20)	0.06	(0.23)	0.04	(0.19)	0.00
Maternal age	27.31	(4.74)	29.06	(4.19)	27.08	(4.76)	0.00
Parity	1.46	(0.72)	1.25	(0.52)	1.49	(0.74)	0.00
Mother's education, n (%)							0.00
< high school	194,990	(37.3%)	3,641	(6.03%)	191,349	(41.38%)	
high school graduate or equivalent	198,140	(37.91%)	36,895	(61.15%)	161,245	(34.87%)	
3 year college	63,226	(12.1%)	8,252	(13.68%)	54,974	(11.89%)	
4 year college graduate	66,347	(12.69%)	11,546	(19.14%)	54,801	(11.85%)	
Mother's job category, n (%)							0.00
Staff	56,596	(10.83%)	56,596	(93.80%)	73,438	(15.88%)	
Agricultural related	5,983	(1.14%)	276	(0.46%)	5,707	(1.23%)	
Housewife	129,749	(24.82%)			129,749	(28.06%)	
Professional and technical personnel	2,050	(0.39%)	497	(0.82%)	1,553	(0.34%)	
Business	26,109	(4.99%)	202	(0.33%)	25,907	(5.60%)	
Worker	35,587	(6.81%)	76	(0.13%)	35,511	(7.68%)	
Other	2,687	(0.51%)	2,687	(4.45%)			
Missing	190,504	(36.45%)			190,504	(41.20%)	
Daily mean $PM_{10}$ exposure( $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ )	60.41	(7.37)	72.33	(7.08)	58.85	(5.82)	0.00
Daily mean $NO_2$ exposure( $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ )	41.93	(5.09)	40.34	(5.98)	42.14	(4.92)	0.00
Daily mean $SO_2$ exposure( $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ )	14.25	(7.86)	35.29	(5.17)	11.50	(1.05)	0.00
Daily mean temperature( $^{\circ}\text{C}$ )	23.18	(1.57)	22.76	(1.80)	23.23	(1.52)	0.00
Daily mean relative humidity(%)	75.37	(3.34)	72.17	(2.91)	75.79	(3.16)	0.00
% Time exposed to $UTCI <= 0^{\circ}\text{C}$	1.39	(0.87)	1.96	(1.19)	1.31	(0.80)	0.00
% Time exposed to $UTCI >= 34^{\circ}\text{C}$	0.43	(0.95)	2.19	(1.87)	0.20	(0.32)	0.00
N	522703		60334		462369		

Notes: Birth weight and gestational age are obtained from birth records from each city. Gestational age is calculated based on self-reported last menstrual period. The remaining variables of individual characteristics are self-reported.

Table A2: Distribution of Daily Mean Universal Thermal Climate Indices (UTCI) in Guangzhou and Shenzhen Between 2000 and 2008.

	Guangzhou	Shenzhen
Top 1% ( °C)	34.23	33.35
Top 2.5% ( °C)	33.56	32.74
Bottom 2.5% ( °C)	2.52	3.82
Bottom 1% ( °C)	-0.87	-0.24
Mean ( °C)	22.61	22.46
s.d.	(8.74)	(8.05)
Number of days above 34 °C	45	12
Number of days above 33 °C	172	54

Source: Copernicus and the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts to combine measurements of temperature and humidity (European Centre for Medium-range Weather Forecasts , ECMWF).

Table A3: First-stage coefficients of different definitions of instrumental variables on prenatal exposure levels to different pollutants

	(1) $PM_{10}$	(2) $NO_2$	(3) $SO_2$
Specification A: temperature + relative humidity	-0.161*** (0.000552)	-0.262*** (0.000643)	-0.126*** (0.000388)
Specification B: extreme cold + extreme hot defined by UTCI	-0.164*** (0.000567)	-0.236*** (0.000732)	-0.108*** (0.000483)

Notes: Each estimate represents a regression coefficient of the first-stage regression of prenatal exposure to each pollutant on the instrumental variable, i.e., a continuous variable summarizing the number of days during one's expected pregnancy (given 39 weeks of gestation) overlapping with the Asian Games period with two specifications: Specification A controls for linear term of daily mean temperature and daily mean relative humidity; Specification B controls for extreme cold and hot weather during pregnancy defined by UTCI. Besides meteorological variables, other control variables include sex, quadratic term of maternal age, parity, education categories, day-of-a-week dummies, conception year fixed effects, city-specific conception season fixed effects. \*\*\* significant at 1%. Robust standard errors are displayed in parentheses.

Table A4: Marginal Effects of  $NO_2$  (by  $10 \mu g/m^3$ ) on the Probability of Low Birthweight, Mean Birthweight and Risk of Preterm.

VARIABLES	Probit Model/OLS Model						IV-Probit Model/2SLS Model					
	Low Birthweight	Birthweight	Preterm	Low Birthweight	Birthweight	Preterm	Low Birthweight	Birthweight	Preterm	Low Birthweight	Birthweight	Preterm
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
$NO_2^* \mu g/m^3$	0.002*** (0.001)	0.002*** (0.001)	-8.56*** (2.311)	-7.074*** (1.866)	0.004*** (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)	0.0020* (0.001)	0.0016 (0.001)	-8.70*** (3.16)	-9.28** (3.72)	0.0038*** (0.001)	0.0033** (0.002)
Temp. ( $^{\circ}C$ )	-0.044 *** (0.004)		115.42*** (9.297)		-0.054 *** (0.004)		-0.004*** (0.000)		11.536*** (0.93)		-0.0053691*** (0.00041)	
Rel. hum. (%)	0.011*** (0.002)		-32.79*** (4.523)		0.016*** (0.002)		0.001*** (0.000)		-3.296*** (0.51)		.0015667*** (0.00023)	
Ext. cold (%)		0.021*** (0.005)		-55.506*** (1.247)		.029*** (0.006)		0.002*** (0.001)		-5.581*** (1.25)		0.0029*** (0.001)
Ext. hot (%)		9.86E-05 (0.005)		10.052 (12.226)		0.003 (0.005)		0.000 (0.001)		1.49 (1.40)		0.00026 (0.001)
Obs.	522,703						522,703					
Spec.	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B

Notes: Each column represents a separate regression. (1)-(6) are from Probit/OLS regressions without applying IV, while (7)-(12) are from IVProbit/2SLS regressions. (1)(2)(5)(6)(7)(8)(11)(12) are marginal effects of  $10 \mu g/m^3 NO_2$  on the probability of Low Birthweight and Preterm at the mean values of all control variables. (3)(4)(9)(10) are marginal effects of  $10 \mu g/m^3 NO_2$  on Mean Birthweight. Control variables include parity, sex of the baby, quadratic function of maternal age, maternal education categories, conception year fixed effects, city-specific conception season fixed effects and weather variables. Specification A and B vary with the weather variables. Specification A controls for linear terms of mean temperature and relative humidity during one's pregnancy, while specification B controls for the percentage of pregnancy exposed to extreme cold and hot defined by UTCI. \*\*\* significant at 1%, \*\* significant at 5%, \*significant at 10%. Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

Table A5: Marginal Effects of  $SO_2$  (by  $10 \mu g/m^3$ ) on the Probability of Low Birthweight, Mean Birthweight and Risk of Preterm.

VARIABLES	Probit Model/OLS Model						IV-Probit Model/2SLS Model					
	Low Birthweight	Birthweight	Preterm	Low Birthweight	Birthweight	Preterm	Low Birthweight	Birthweight	Preterm	Low Birthweight	Birthweight	Preterm
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
$SO_2^*$ $10\mu g/m^3$	0.01*** (0.002)	0.009*** (0.002)	-15.97*** (4.213)	-14.36*** (4.741)	0.014*** (0.002)	0.0133*** (0.002)	0.0045* (0.002)	0.0031 (0.003)	-18.12*** (6.570)	-20.34** (8.160)	.0083 *** (0.003)	0.0076** (0.003)
Temp. ( $^{\circ}C$ )	-0.0048*** (0.000)		12.298*** (0.931)		-0.00589*** (0.000)		-0.005*** (0.000)		12.354*** (0.94)		-0.0057 *** (0.00415)	
Rel. hum. (%)	0.0011*** (0.000)		-2.531*** (0.370)		0.00137*** (0.000)		0.001*** (0.000)		-2.564*** (0.38)		0.0013*** (0.00178)	
Ext. cold (%)		0.002*** (0.001)		-5.639*** (1.248)		0.003*** (0.001)		0.002*** (0.001)		-5.716*** (1.251)		0.003*** (0.001)
Ext. hot (%)		-0.0007 (0.001)		1.267 (1.299)		-0.00072 (0.001)		0.000 (0.001)		2.023 (1.524)		0.000 (0.001)
Obs.	522,703						522,703					
Spec.	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B

Notes: Each column represents a separate regression. (1)-(6) are from Probit/OLS regressions without applying IV, while (7)-(12) are from IVProbit/2SLS regressions. (1),(2),(5),(6),(7),(8),(11),(12) are marginal effects of  $10 \mu g/m^3$   $SO_2$  on the probability of Low Birthweight and Preterm at the mean values of all control variables. (3),(4),(9),(10) are marginal effects of  $10\mu g/m^3$   $SO_2$  on Mean Birthweight. Control variables include parity, sex of the baby, quadratic function of maternal age, maternal education categories, conception year fixed effects, city-specific conception season fixed effects and weather variables. Specification A and B vary with the weather variables. Specification A controls for linear terms of mean temperature and relative humidity during one's pregnancy, while specification B controls for the percentage of pregnancy exposed to extreme cold and hot defined by UTCI. \*\*\* significant at 1%, \*\* significant at 5%, \*significant at 10%. Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

Table A6: Heterogeneous Effects of  $NO_2$  on Birth Outcomes by Sex and Maternal Age Group

VARIABLES	Low Birthweight			Birthweight			Preterm
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	
$NO_2$ * male	0.000414 (0.005)	0.000419 (0.005)	2.086** (1.066)	2.086** (1.066)	-0.0012 (0.004)	-0.0011 (0.004)	
$NO_2$ * (momage >= 35)	0.00169 (0.00126)	0.00169 (0.00126)	-7.757*** (2.417)	-7.747*** (2.417)	0.00199 (0.00142)	0.00199 (0.00142)	
Specification	A	B	A	B	A	B	

Notes: IV estimates of the interaction term between  $NO_2$  and male or age35+ on birth outcomes, with the same set of control variables as in Table 2. \*\*\* significant at 1%, \*\* significant at 5%, \*significant at 10%.



Table A7: Heterogeneous Effects of SO<sub>2</sub> on Birth Outcomes by Sex and Maternal Age Group

VARIABLES	Low Birthweight			Birthweight			Preterm
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	
SO <sub>2</sub> * male	-0.000151 (0.002)	-0.000151 (0.002)	-0.806** (0.412)	-0.808* (0.412)	0.000450 (0.002)	0.000452 (0.002)	
SO <sub>2</sub> * (momage >= 35)	0.000483 (0.000359)	0.000483 (0.000359)	-2.218*** (0.684)	-2.214*** (0.684)	0.000569 (0.000405)	0.000569 (0.000405)	
Specification	A	B	A	B	A	B	

Notes: IV estimates of the interaction term between SO<sub>2</sub> and male or age35+ on birth outcomes, with the same set of control variables as in Table 2. \*\*\* significant at 1%, \*\* significant at 5%, \* significant at 10%.

## Appendix 2: Robustness check: missing observations of labor migrants

There still may be concern over labor migrants in the sample, as these two cities are the most popular destinations for labor migrants in China. Labor migrants may return to their hometowns for child birth. Although this should not be a concern for this study as long as labor migrants do not leave the city for child birth specifically during the Asian Games period, we do find that the number of live deliveries is lower during the Asian Games period in Guangzhou (20 October 2010 - 20 December 2010) compared to the same period in other years, relative to Shenzhen (see Figure A3.). As we do not observe migration status of women in the Guangzhou sample, we try to control for mothers' job types as a sensitivity check as labor migrants are more likely to work as "workers". The main results remain basically the same, as shown in Table A8. Because mothers' job type information was not collected in a consistent framework between the two cities, and 40.3% of the population have missing information on job,<sup>17</sup> we do not present these results as the main results. The similar results on air pollution exposure after controlling for mothers' job categories should help alleviate concern over missing labor migrants in the sample.

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<sup>17</sup>In the regression that controls for maternal job category, we treat missing job information as a job category because it is likely that missing is not random.

Table A8: Marginal Effects of  $PM_{10}$ ,  $NO_2$  and  $SO_2$  (by  $10 \mu g/m^3$ ) on the Probability of Low Birthweight, Mean Birthweight and Risk of Preterm (by IV-probit/2SLS Estimates, with Control of Mother's Job Category).

VARIABLES	$PM_{10}$			$NO_2$			$SO_2$											
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)
Pollutant( $10\mu g/m^3$ )	Low Birthweight	Birthweight	Preterm	Low Birthweight	Birthweight	Preterm	Low Birthweight	Birthweight	Preterm	Low Birthweight	Birthweight	Preterm	Low Birthweight	Birthweight	Preterm	Low Birthweight	Birthweight	Preterm
	0.003 (0.002)	0.0016 (0.002)	-11.69** (0.50)	-11.33** (0.52)	0.0061*** (0.000)	0.0040* (0.002)	0.000 (0.000)	0.0012 (0.001)	-7.16** (3.06)	-7.84** (3.62)	0.0035*** (0.001)	0.0028* (0.002)	0.000 (0.000)	0.0029 (0.000)	-14.94** (6.38)	-17.19** (7.93)	0.0077*** (0.003)	0.0068** (0.003)
Temp.(°C)	-0.041*** (0.000)		11.09*** (1.01)		-0.047*** (0.000)		-0.004*** (0.000)	11.73*** (0.94)			-0.0053 (0.000)			-0.0046*** (0.000)	12.41*** (9.45)		-0.0056*** (0.000)	
Rel. hum.(%)	0.0012*** (0.000)		-3.54*** (0.60)		0.0017*** (0.000)		0.0011*** (0.000)	-3.26*** (0.51)			0.0016*** (0.000)			0.001*** (0.000)	-2.66*** (0.38)		0.0013*** (0.000)	
Ext. cold (%)		0.0019*** (0.001)		-6.56*** (1.305)		0.0027*** (0.001)		0.002*** (0.001)	-5.88*** (1.25)			0.0029*** (0.001)		0.0021*** (0.001)		-5.99*** (1.26)		0.0029*** (0.001)
Ext. hot (%)		0.000 (0.000)		0.16 (1.169)		0.00090* (0.001)		0.000 (0.001)	1.51 (1.40)			0.00035 (0.001)		0.000 (0.001)		1.96 (1.53)		0.000 (0.001)
Obs.				516,720					516,720							516,720		
Specification	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
Mother's job	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

Notes: The sample removes individuals who conduct agricultural related job. Each column represents a separate regression from IV-Probit/2SLS regressions. (1),(2),(5),(6) are marginal effects of  $10 \mu g/m^3$   $PM_{10}$  on the probability of Low Birthweight and Preterm at the mean values of all control variables. (3),(4) are marginal effects of  $10\mu g/m^3$   $PM_{10}$  on Mean Birthweight (similar for other two pollutants). Control variables include parity, sex of the baby, quadratic function of maternal age, maternal education categories, maternal job category, conception year fixed effects, city-specific conception season fixed effects and weather variables. Specification A and B vary with the weather variables. Specification A controls for linear terms of mean temperature and relative humidity during one's pregnancy, while specification B controls for the percentage of pregnancy exposed to extreme cold and hot defined by UTCI. \*\*\* significant at 1%, \*\* significant at 5%, \*significant at 10%. Robust standard errors are in parentheses.