

## Prematurity

### Introduction

In most pregnancies, labor starts between 37 and 42 weeks gestation. Labor before 37 completed weeks of pregnancy is considered preterm. 12.3% of all live births occur before term in the U.S. and preterm birth accounts for about two-thirds of all infant deaths.

Growth and development in the last part of pregnancy are vital to the baby's health. The earlier the baby is born, the greater the chance he or she will have health problems.

Preterm babies tend to grow more slowly than term babies. They also may have problems with their eyes, ears, breathing, and nervous system. Learning and behavioral problems are more common in children who were preterm babies.

### Why Does It Happen?

In nearly 40% of premature births, the cause of premature labor and birth is unknown.

### What We Know

Preterm labor can occur in any pregnancy without warning. Obese women, women who have little or no prenatal care and those who have had preterm labor before are at increased risk.

### Costly Issue

Every year, more than 500,000 babies in the U.S. will be born prematurely. Medical costs for a premature baby are much greater than for a healthy newborn. In 2005, preterm birth cost the U.S. at least \$26.2 billion, \$51,600 for every infant born prematurely.

### What Is Needed

The federal government can tackle prematurity through targeted research investments, public awareness campaigns, and programs to prioritize this public health challenge and save taxpayer dollars.

Research and programs should focus on:

- Inequities
- Low birth weight
- Basic late-preterm research
- Basic gestational dating research
- Progesterone
- Preeclampsia
- Obesity

### What Can Congress Do?

Congress can help improve maternal and infant outcomes by prioritizing prematurity research and programs. Congress can:

- Reintroduce, cosponsor, and reauthorize the PREMIE Act.
- Increase funding for the Safe Motherhood program at CDC.
- Increase funding for prematurity research at NICHD.
- Reintroduce, cosponsor, and pass the Birth Defects Prevention, Risk Reduction, and Awareness Act.
- Reintroduce, cosponsor, and pass the Stillbirth & SUID Prevention, Education, and Awareness Act.

