



The March of Dimes Prematurity Campaign

Prematurity is the leading killer of America's newborns. Those who survive often have lifelong health problems, including cerebral palsy, mental retardation, chronic lung disease, blindness and hearing loss.

Prematurity has been escalating steadily and alarmingly over the past two decades. In 2004, more than 500,000 infants were born prematurely, the highest number ever reported for the U.S. In 2005, the United States as a society paid at least \$26.2 billion in economic costs associated with preterm birth (medical and educational expenses, loss in productivity).

Preterm delivery can happen to any pregnant woman. The causes of nearly half of all preterm births are unknown.

The March of Dimes has taken on this devastating problem—to find out what causes it and how it can be stopped.

About the Prematurity Campaign

The March of Dimes Prematurity Campaign is a multimillion-dollar research, awareness and education campaign to help families have healthier babies. The campaign:

- Funds research to find the causes of premature birth
- Encourages investment of public and private research dollars to identify causes and to identify and test promising interventions
- Educates women about risk-reduction strategies and the signs and symptoms of premature labor
- Provides information and emotional support to families affected by prematurity
- Advocates to expand access to health care coverage to improve maternity care and infant health outcomes
- Helps health care providers to improve risk detection and address risk factors
- Generates concern and action around the problem

In 2006, the campaign achieved a major milestone: Congress passed, and the President signed, the PREEMIE Act, which authorizes increased federal support for research and education on prematurity. Work continues on appropriation of funding to implement the act's provisions.

National Research Agenda on Prematurity

The March of Dimes Scientific Advisory Committee on Prematurity has identified six priority areas for a national research agenda on prematurity. Preterm birth is a complex disorder, like heart disease or diabetes, with no single cause. Consequently, it requires a multifaceted approach. The six priority areas are:

1. New epidemiologic studies focused on the risk of extremely preterm births to identify the factors that predispose women to very early labor and delivery.
2. Genes and their interaction with the environment that, together, lead to preterm birth
3. Racial and ethnic differences. While prematurity affects all socioeconomic groups, there are significant racial and ethnic disparities. For example, in 2002, non-Hispanic African Americans had the highest rate of premature births at 17.7 percent, well above the national rate of 12.1 percent. We know very little about why these differences occur.
4. The roles of infection and immune response to those infections.
5. The effects of stress on the mother and fetus.
6. Clinical trials to assess the impact of potential treatments, to identify the women who could most benefit, and to determine the best time to provide treatment during pregnancy.

For over 65 years, the March of Dimes has saved millions of babies and children from death and disabilities through our life-saving research, innovative programs, and dedicated volunteers. The March of Dimes was founded in 1938 by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to defeat polio, a dreaded disease that claimed the lives and limbs of America's children in record numbers. Within 17 years, the Salk vaccine was developed and polio was defeated.

The March of Dimes then turned its attention to an even greater challenge—fighting birth defects and other infant health problems. With a track record of success in bringing people together to solve complex health challenges, the March of Dimes is uniquely qualified to take on the problem of prematurity.

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