

Preterm birth rate shows three year improvement in most states

November 1 2011



According to the 2011 March of Dimes Premature Birth Report Card, three states and Puerto Rico received an F, 11 states and the District of Columbia earned a D, 19 states got a C, 16 states received a B and only Vermont earned an A. The United States received a “C” based on comparing the nation’s 2009 preliminary preterm birth rate of 12.2 percent with the March of Dimes new 2020 goal of 9.6 percent of all live births. Credit: March of Dimes

Preterm birth rates improved in almost every state between 2006 and 2009, and in several states the change was more than 10 percent, according to the March of Dimes 2011 Premature Birth Report Card.

"The three-year improvement in the U.S. preterm [birth rate](#) means that 40,000 more babies were given a healthy start in life and spared the risk of life-long [health consequences](#) of an early birth," said Dr. Jennifer L.

Howse, president of the March of Dimes. "It means that, nationwide, we saved at least \$2 billion in health care and socio-economic costs. Now we owe it to the other half a million infants who were born too soon to work together to give them the same chance."

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The improvement in the preterm birth rate is due to a variety of health interventions, the March of Dimes says. For more than two years, the March of Dimes has been working with hospitals and health policy experts to identify and promote quality improvement initiatives that have reduced the number of medically unnecessary c-sections and inductions scheduled before 39 weeks of pregnancy. Also new treatments, such as progesterone, which has been shown to prevent some preterm births in medically eligible women, has helped lower the preterm birth rate.



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Preterm birth, birth before 37 weeks gestation, is a serious health problem that costs the United States more than \$26 billion annually, according to the 2006 Institute of Medicine report. It is the leading cause of newborn death, and babies who survive an early birth often face the risk of lifelong health challenges, such as breathing problems, cerebral palsy, intellectual disabilities and others. Even babies born just a few weeks early have higher rates of hospitalization and illness than full-term infants. If there are no medical complications that require an early delivery, at least 39 weeks of pregnancy are critical to a baby's health because many important organs, including the brain and lungs, are not completely developed until then.

The March of Dimes report card compares each state's preterm birth rate to the March of Dimes goal of lowering the rate to 9.6 percent of all live births by 2020. The March of Dimes says this goal can be achieved by a combination of activities: giving all women of childbearing age access to health care coverage, fully implementing proven interventions to reduce the risk of an early birth, such as not smoking during pregnancy, getting preconception and early prenatal care, progesterone treatments for women who are medically eligible, avoiding multiples from fertility treatments, avoiding elective c-sections and inductions before 39 weeks of pregnancy unless medically necessary, and by funding new research on prevention of preterm birth. The Report Card

information for the U.S. and states are available online at:

<http://www.marchofdimes.com/prematurity>.

This year, for the first time, a World Prematurity Day will be observed on November 17 by the March of Dimes along with organizations in Africa, Europe, and Australia. Worldwide, an estimated 13 million babies are born preterm and, of those, one million die as a result of their early birth, according to an October 2009 March of Dimes report on the global toll of [preterm birth](#).

Provided by March of Dimes Foundation

Citation: Preterm birth rate shows three year improvement in most states (2011, November 1) retrieved 28 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-11-preterm-birth-year-states.html>

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