

LA hospital prepares to send tiny baby home

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Haydee Ibarra looks at her 14-week-old daughter, Melinda Star Guido, at the Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center in Los Angeles, Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2011. At birth, Melinda Star Guido tipped the scales at only 9 1/2 ounces, less than a can of soda. After spending her early months in the neonatal intensive care unit, a team of doctors and nurses will gather Friday Jan. 20, 2012 to see her off as she heads home. She is the world's third smallest baby and the second smallest in the U.S. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)

(AP) -- One of the world's smallest surviving babies is headed home.

Melinda Star Guido weighed only 9 1/2 ounces at birth- less than a can of soda. After spending her early months in the neonatal [intensive care unit](#), a team of doctors and nurses will gather Friday to see her off.

Melinda has been growing steadily and [gaining weight](#) since she was born premature at 24 weeks in August at the Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center. She is the world's third smallest baby and the second

smallest in the U.S.

Now weighing 4 1/2 pounds, doctors said Melinda has made enough progress to be discharged. It's too early to know how she will fare developmentally and physically, but doctors planned to monitor her for the next six years.

Most babies this small don't survive even with advanced medical care. About 7,500 babies are born each year in the United States weighing less than 1 pound, and about 10 percent survive.

A study published in the [journal Pediatrics](#) in 2010 found that many survivors have ongoing health and learning concerns. Most also remain short and underweight for their age.

There are some rare success stories. The smallest surviving baby born weighing 9.2 ounces is now a healthy 7-year-old and another who weighed 9.9 ounces at birth is an honors college student studying psychology, according to doctors at Loyola University Medical Center in Illinois where the girls were born.

Soon after birth, Melinda was treated for an [eye disorder](#) that's common in [premature babies](#) and underwent surgery to close an artery. Melinda's mother, 22-year-old Haydee Ibarra, held her for the first time after the operation in November.

Despite the hurdles, doctors said Melinda was fortunate she did not suffer serious complications such as bleeding in the brain.

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