

# Researchers help save the lives of very premature babies

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(Medical Xpress)—Researchers from Christchurch have played a crucial role in an international study aimed at saving the lives of very premature babies.

The researchers, led in New Zealand by University of Otago, Christchurch, Professor Brian Darlow, investigated the critical issue of how much oxygen should be given to very premature babies. Their work is likely to change clinical practice worldwide.

The results of the study involving babies from New Zealand, Australia and the United Kingdom are published in the latest edition of the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Professor Darlow says many premature babies need extra oxygen for many weeks after they are born. How much they get is guided by measuring [oxygen levels](#) with a small probe on a hand or a foot. Although it was known that both too much and too little oxygen could be harmful for [premature babies](#), the optimal target level was not known.

Professor Darlow says prior to the research quite a wide range of oxygen level was targeted. The aim of the research was to find out if it was better to target the lower or the upper half of this range.

"We found that babies cared for on the lower oxygen target had slightly lower [survival rates](#) than babies on the higher target. This is important information because many doctors were favouring lower targets in an

attempt to prevent problems of higher oxygen, including serious problems with later vision. But the eye disease can be quite successfully treated."

Neonatal intensive care units at Auckland City Hospital, Middlemore, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin contributed to the study. These results were part of a total sample of almost 2500 babies who were born at least 12 weeks premature.

The researchers next step will be to look at two year outcomes for babies in this study. They will also join with similar studies worldwide to provide a sample of almost 5,000 babies.

Provided by University of Otago

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