

California receives 'A' grade on Preterm Birth Report Card

November 4 2013

California has improved its grade on the March of Dimes 2013 Premature Birth report card, moving from a 'B' grade in 2012 to an 'A' grade in 2013.

California is giving more [babies](#) a healthy start in life and contributing to a six-year trend of improvement nationwide. California earned the 'A' [report card](#) for lowering its preterm birth rate to 9.6 percent, which is especially impressive as one out of every eight babies is born in California, which accounts for 12 percent of all births in the United States, and the state has one of the most diverse populations.

"We're proud of California's improved grade on the report card, joining only 5 other [states](#) and the District of Columbia in receiving a better grade," said Karyn DeMartini, State Director of the California Chapter of March of Dimes. "California has been a leader in the fight to prevent [premature birth](#), developing the toolkits to reduce medically unnecessary early elective deliveries and to assess preterm labor that healthcare providers across the country are using. While this grade is a marked improvement, we will continue our work to give all babies a healthy start in life because yearly nearly 50,000 babies in California are still born too soon, before their lungs, brains or other organs are fully developed. Partnerships with our state health officials, local hospitals, and elected representatives have helped us make newborn health a priority in California and made an incredible difference in babies' lives."

The California Chapter of the March of Dimes has been the vanguard in

implementing programs, developing educational materials and resources, working closely with state health department officials, co-sponsoring effective legislation, and supporting hospital efforts to end early elective deliveries that will help women have full-term pregnancies and ensure babies get a healthy start in life.

"California is the largest and most diverse state amongst those receiving an 'A' grade on preterm [birth rates](#) from the March of Dimes," said Dr. Ron Chapman, California Department of Public Health director and state health officer. "This administration is committed to improving the health of Californians, and we are proud to partner with March of Dimes on quality improvement initiatives and public health interventions that make our state a model in preventing preterm birth nationally."

California is part of a national trend toward improved preterm birth rates. On the 2013 Report Card, 31 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia saw improvement in their preterm birth rates between 2011 and 2012, earning seven of them, including California, better grades. Nationwide, the largest declines in premature birth occurred among babies born at 34 to 36 weeks of pregnancy (late preterm birth). Nearly every state saw its preterm birth rate decline since 2006, the national peak.

In California, the rate of late preterm births is 6.9%; the rate of women smoking is 11% and the rate of uninsured women is 23.8%. These factors contribute to improved infant health in California. The state earned a 'satisfactory' star on the report card for:

- Reducing the percent of uninsured women of child-bearing age
- Lowering the late preterm birth rate

These improvements mean not just healthier babies, but also a potential savings in health care and economic costs to society. However, there is

still work to be done in reducing the percentage of women of childbearing age who smoke. The rate of women in California who smoke increased from 10.4% to 11.0% during this reporting period. March of Dimes will continue to work with the state legislature and other healthcare organizations to educate women on the dangers of smoking to reduce this percentage.

March of Dimes attributes the improved preterm birth rates to an expansion of successful programs and interventions, including actions by state health officials here and every other state, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, who formally set goals to lower their preterm birth rates by 8 percent from their 2009 rate by 2014.

"We will continue to work together to improve access to health care, help women quit smoking and, through our Healthy Babies Are Worth the Wait consumer education campaign, encourage women and [health](#) care providers to avoid scheduling a delivery before 39 weeks of pregnancy unless medically necessary," DeMartini added. "Seventy five percent of the hospitals in California are currently using March of Dimes toolkits and educational materials, and that is helping us see these incredibly positive results in our preterm birth rate, and we strongly encourage the remaining twenty-five percent to partner with us in building a world of healthier moms and babies here in California."

Despite these improvements in California and other states, the United States again received a "C" on the March of Dimes Report Card. Grades are based on comparing each state's and the nation's 2012 preliminary preterm birth rates with the March of Dimes 2020 goal of 9.6 percent of all live births. The U.S. preterm birth rate is 11.5 percent, a decline of 10 percent from the peak of 12.8 percent in 2006. Although we have made great progress, the U.S. still has the highest [preterm birth](#) rate of any industrial country.

More information: The Report Card information for the U.S. and individual states is available online at:

www.marchofdimes.com/reportcard

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