

Preterm-birth complications leading global killer of young children

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To mark World Prematurity Day on Monday, researchers announce \$250 million to combat the problem.

(HealthDay)—More than 3,000 children under the age of 5 die worldwide each day from preterm birth complications, making it the leading cause of death among young children, a new study reports.

That means that for the first time in history, complications from preterm births are the leading killer of [young children](#) around the globe, according to the researchers.

Complications from [preterm birth](#) caused nearly 1.1 million of the 6.3 million deaths of children under age 5 in 2013. Direct complications from preterm birth caused 965,000 deaths among children up to 28 days old, and another 125,000 deaths among children aged 1 month to 5 years, the report authors said.

Other major causes of [death](#) among children under age 5 include pneumonia (935,000 deaths) and childbirth complications (720,000 deaths), according to the study published Nov. 16 in *The Lancet*.

Countries with the most [children](#) under age 5 who died from preterm birth complications were: India (361,600), Nigeria (98,300), Pakistan (75,000), Democratic Republic of the Congo (40,600), China (37,200), Bangladesh (26,100), Indonesia (25,800), Ethiopia (24,400), Angola (15,900) and Kenya (13,300), according to the report.

Countries with the highest percentage of under-5 deaths directly resulting from preterm birth complications included: Macedonia (51 percent); Slovenia (47.5 percent); Denmark (43 percent); Serbia (39.8 percent); the United Kingdom (38.7 percent); Hungary (37.4 percent); Slovakia (34.9 percent); Poland (34.8 percent); Republic of Korea and Switzerland (32.7 percent).

The global average percentage of deaths under [age](#) 5 directly due to preterm birth complications is 17.4 percent. The rate in the United States is about 28 percent, or about 8,100 deaths a year. The United States ranks 141st on the list of 162 countries, followed by Oman, Georgia, Egypt, Canada, Germany and Qatar, the study found.

The research was coordinated by Dr. Robert Black, of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, along with the World Health Organization and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

"This marks a turning of the tide, a transition from infections to neonatal conditions, especially those related to premature births, and this will require entirely different medical and public health approaches," research team member Dr. Joy Lawn, of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, said in a March of Dimes news release.

"The success we've seen in the ongoing fight against infectious diseases demonstrates that we can also be successful if we invest in prevention and care for preterm birth," Lawn added.

Monday, Nov. 17 has been designated World Prematurity Day. The researchers announced \$250 million in new funding to study ways to prevent or reduce complications of preterm birth within three to five years. The effort will involve more than 200 researchers.

More information: The U.S. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development has more about [preterm labor and birth](#).

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