

More babies born prematurely, new report shows

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The preterm birth rate rose again in 2005 and preliminary data for 2006 show a continued increase, underscoring the urgent need for a sustained, comprehensive plan to address this growing crisis.

“The more we learn about the terrible consequences of an early birth, the more determined the March of Dimes is to understand what causes preterm birth and how it can be prevented,” said Dr. Jennifer L. Howse, president of the March of Dimes. “That’s why we are supporting a U.S. Surgeon General’s conference for 2008 to bring together experts and develop a national agenda to prevent preterm labor and delivery.”

Today, the National Center for Health Statistics released final birth data for 2005 showing that the preterm birth rate, the percentage of babies born at less than 37 weeks gestation, is continuing its relentless rise, with more than 525,000 babies, or 12.7 percent, born prematurely. That’s up from 12.5 percent in 2004 and the 2006 preliminary report indicates that the preterm birth rate will continue its upward trend and reach 12.8 percent, about 543,000 babies.

The preterm birth rate has increased more than 20 percent since 1990. The data can be found at www.cdc.gov/nchs.

Prematurity is the leading cause of death in the first month of life, and even late preterm infants have a greater risk of respiratory distress syndrome (RDS), feeding difficulties, temperature instability (hypothermia), jaundice and delayed brain development.

In 2005, preterm birth costs the nation more than \$26.2 billion in medical and educational costs and lost productivity. Average first year medical costs were about 10 times greater for preterm than for term infants.

Source: March of Dimes Foundation

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