

# Researchers advance the understanding of preterm birth

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Preterm birth is the leading cause of infant morbidity and mortality worldwide. The causes for preterm birth are complex and not fully understood, however emerging data suggest that the presence of certain

bacteria in a woman's vagina and cervix may increase her risk of premature birth. In a study to be presented on February 1, 2018, at the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine's (SMFM) annual meeting, The Pregnancy Meeting, researchers will unveil findings that demonstrate that the byproducts of bacteria induce cervical changes which may lead to preterm birth.

The study to be presented was funded by the March of Dimes Prematurity Research Center at the University of Pennsylvania and examined the effects of three specific [bacteria](#) (*Mobiluncus mulieris*, *Gardnerella vaginalis* and *Lactobacillus*) on [cervical cells](#). Researchers found that two of the bacteria studied play a role in spontaneous preterm birth by compromising the cervix and causing changes in the expression of genes. The third bacteria studied did not have the same effect.

"Vaginal and cervical bacteria have diverse effects on the cervix," said Michal Elovitz, MD, lead author of the study and professor of obstetrics and gynecology, vice chair of translational research, and director of the Maternal and Child Health Research Center at the University of Pennsylvania, School of Medicine. "After previous human studies, in which the mechanism was not fully understood, this is an exciting next step to better understanding spontaneous [preterm birth](#)."

Provided by Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine

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