Preventing Premature Birth

Premature birth is a complex problem with no single solution. More than 450,000 babies are born prematurely each year in the United States. In about half of cases, the cause is unknown. March of Dimes researchers are seeking the causes of prematurity as a step toward developing ways to prevent it.

In 2004, the March of Dimes began the Prematurity Research Initiative (PRI), which funds research into the causes of prematurity. Since then, nearly $24 million has been awarded to 73 grantees. Some PRI grantees are exploring how genetics or a combination of genetic and environmental factors may influence a woman’s chances of going into labor prematurely. Others are examining how infections may trigger early labor. Infections involving a woman’s uterus may contribute to about one of every four premature births. These infections often show no symptoms.

PRI grantees also are exploring new ways to treat preterm labor. Some are studying how the body normally suppresses uterine contractions until a baby reaches full term, so that new drugs can be developed to prevent or stop preterm labor.

In addition to PRI support, the March of Dimes funds prematurity research through its national research program. Grantees are improving the care of premature babies by developing new ways to help prevent or treat common complications of prematurity. For example, researchers helped develop surfactant treatment, which has saved tens of thousands of premature babies with breathing problems.

The March of Dimes is pioneering a novel team approach to examine the complex problem of preterm birth from every angle. Our transdisciplinary research centers are aimed exclusively at finding the unknown causes of premature birth. At these centers, scientists from many diverse disciplines work together to develop new strategies to understand, and ultimately develop preventions for preterm labor. The March of Dimes intends to invest $10 million in its transdisciplinary prematurity research program over five years. The Ohio Collaborative celebrates its one-year anniversary this month, and three more centers are planned to open in the next 12 months.

“The research investment is already beginning to pay off,” says Dr. Louis Muglia of Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center, coordinating principal investigator of the Ohio Collaborative. He noted that participating researchers have begun to explain how genetics and the environment interact to trigger preterm labor, and how it might be prevented. Researchers also are working to explain racial disparities in preterm birth and offering one-time clinical consultations to women at high risk of preterm birth, to help them better understand their risk factors and take steps to prevent having a premature baby. To learn more, click here.
2014 Perinatal Summit

Save the date! The Greater Kentucky Chapter of the March of Dimes will host our annual Perinatal Summit on Friday, November 7, 2014 at the Louisville Airport Crowne Plaza.

Our keynote speaker will be Dr. Jay Iams, Professor and Vice Chair of the Department of Obstetrics & Gynecology at Ohio State University. Dr. Iams also serves as the Clinical Chair in Obstetrics for the Ohio Perinatal Quality Collaborative.

More information and registration details will be available soon. If you have questions, contact Kara Brown.

Seeking Volunteers for Every Woman Southeast Team

Every Woman Southeast (EWSE) is a coalition of leaders in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee building multi-state, multi-layered partnerships to improve the health of women and infants in the Southeast. Research has shown the importance of a healthy lifestyle for women during their reproductive years, and the significant positive impact this has on future generations. Every Woman Southeast represents a concerted effort on the part of public health leaders across these nine states to find common goals and strategies among many different partners to maximize our capacity to provide comprehensive, preventive services to women of childbearing age. Through our work together, we seek to foster leadership building and resource sharing, stimulate new ideas, develop innovative partnerships, and promote effective programs and policies for moving the women’s health agenda forward in our region.

We believe that we are stronger together. The Every Woman Southeast Initiative could not happen without support from partners at the local and regional level. Each state has a team of volunteers who share information with their colleagues and networks. We are looking for more volunteers to join our Kentucky state team. If you are interested in joining the Kentucky team, contact Kara Brown. To learn more about EWSE, visit www.everywomansoutheast.org.

Cooking for Dad?

Need some new recipes? BAM! This Father’s Day, Emeril Lagasse is sharing his favorite recipes with the March of Dimes as part of the imbornto® campaign. Click here and fire up something special for Dad this year!
Preconception Health Tips

Having a healthy baby begins well before you get pregnant. Start making healthy choices now. If you currently have any medical conditions, be sure they are in control and being treated before becoming pregnant. Some of these conditions include: sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), diabetes, high blood pressure, arthritis, and chronic diseases.

Get a preconception checkup, which is a medical checkup you get before pregnancy. This checkup helps make sure you’re healthy when you get pregnant. At this checkup, your medical provider will check your health and screen for any new health problems, talk with you about your family health history and your lifestyle, and answer any questions you have about getting pregnant. Even if this isn’t your first pregnancy, you should get a checkup as your health may have changed since your last pregnancy.

Since half of all pregnancies in the United States are not planned, all women of childbearing age should take 400 micrograms of folic acid every day. Folic acid will help reduce your baby’s risk for birth defects of the brain and spine.

Talk with your doctor or other health professional if you smoke, use drugs, or drink excessive amounts of alcohol; or live in a stressful or abusive environment.

Your doctor can help you with counseling, treatment, and other support services.


Mission Connection—Mothers March

Mothers March is the first and longest-running March of Dimes fundraising event. It began in 1950 with a door-to-door campaign to fight polio. Parents in Phoenix, Arizona organized a collection: "Turn on your porch light, fight polio tonight." In minutes, more than $45,000 was raised, and the annual Mothers March Campaign was born.

Today, more than 60 years later, the campaign continues and has evolved to give babies a healthy start in life through lifesaving research and programs.

Volunteers are recruited over the phone and mailed special volunteer kits containing cards, letters and a list of neighbors. These volunteers address, stamp and mail letters to their neighbors, collect the donations and then return raised funds to the March of Dimes.

We thank the hundreds of thousands of volunteers who continue the tradition and participate in this historic campaign every year in communities all across America, helping to raise funds and awareness. To learn more, email mothersmarch@marchofdimes.com.