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Dear Supporter,

As we settle into spring, we embark on a pivotal chapter in our history. It's all here, in your May brief.

News

Exactly one week ago, researchers at our March of Dimes Prematurity Research Center (PRC) at Imperial College London opened enrollment in a historic randomized controlled trial (RCT) testing whether a vaginal live biotherapeutic can reduce the risk of preterm birth. We've covered this trial in previous briefs and on our MODCAST, and now, it's officially underway.

This is the first RCT to evaluate a live biotherapeutic for preterm birth prevention, and it reflects nearly a decade of March of Dimes' investment totaling over $10 million. Participants at high risk of preterm birth will be

randomized to either a placebo or an intervention arm, with those in the intervention group receiving a vaginal suppository containing Lactobacillus crispatus — a beneficial bacteria associated with a healthy vaginal microbiome. If results, expected in 2029, show the bacteria is effective at lowering rates of preterm birth, the therapeutic could advance toward clinical approval.

Read our press release on the trial's potential.

Awards

Mark your calendars:

Nominations are now open for our career achievement award, the March of Dimes Richard B. Johnston, Jr., MD Prize.

We close the application portal for our March of Dimes Basil O'Connor Starter Scholar Research Awards, given to early career scientists, May 30.

The application portal for our March of Dimes Discovery Grants, awarded to scientists proposing translational research in the field of maternal-fetal health, opens June 8.

And looking a little way out, you've got until September 16 to nominate a leading pregnancy and infant nutrition researcher, educator, or clinician for our March of Dimes Agnes Higgins Award in Maternal-Fetal Nutrition.

Blog

Our latest blog spotlights recent research — including contributions from two March of Dimes-affiliated scientists — examining how a mother's prenatal exposure to fever, placental inflammation, and preterm birth shape her child's risk of ADHD and other neurodevelopmental conditions. The study had four notable findings: maternal immune activation during pregnancy (through fever or placental inflammation) elevates a child's likelihood of ADHD; placental inflammation is a stronger risk predictor than fever alone; risk peaks when

both occur together; and preterm birth independently raises ADHD risk — with the combination of prematurity and maternal immune activation producing a synergistic effect greater than the sum of either factor alone.

Podcast

Our featured episode this month is an interview with Dr. Thomas Jansson, the 2026 winner of the March of Dimes Agnes Higgins Award in Maternal-Fetal Nutrition. Dr. Jansson discusses his research showing that a placental protein signaling hub called mTOR is the primary architect of fetal growth based on maternal signals. Dr. Jansson's research shifted longstanding assumptions away from the belief that the fetus independently regulates nutrient transfer across the placenta. His work showed that placental mTOR regulates nutrient transfer based on maternal supply rather than fetal demand. Plus, stick around until the end and learn about Dr. Jansson's latest research: testing a small group of recently discovered placenta-secreted proteins that could prove lifesaving for preterm babies.

Listen to or watch our latest MODCAST.

Publications

A scalable embryonic stem cell-based platform for efficient generation of mitochondrial DNA mutant mice

Complement and neutrophils are actively involved at the cervicovaginal interface in cases of adverse microbial composition, cervical shortening and spontaneous preterm birth

CytoBatchFlagR: A Comprehensive Framework to Objectively Assess High-Parameter Cytometry Data for Batch Effects

Optimization of the Multi-Channel Surface Electrogram Acquisition for Noninvasive Uterine Electrophysiology Imaging

Virtual patients, real learning: extended reality simulation for clinical

menopause education

Nothing else this month. See you in June.

Dr. Emre Seli
Chief Scientific Advisor
March of Dimes

HEALTHY MOMS. STRONG BABIES.

MARCH OF DIMES

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