



**Kentucky Public Health**

Prevent. Promote. Protect.

## Helping Kentucky Mothers Deliver Healthy Babies

*52 Weeks of Public Health Spotlight: Prematurity Awareness Month*



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**FRANKFORT, Ky. (November 1, 2017)** – Premature birth is the leading cause of newborn death and childhood disability. As part of the 52 Weeks of Public Health campaign, the Kentucky Department for Public Health (DPH) within the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) is promoting preterm birth prevention as a part of Prematurity Awareness Month.

Every day that a baby is in the mother's womb is critical to the growth and overall development of the child. When a baby is born even just a few weeks early, the risk of developmental delays, chronic respiratory problems as well as vision and hearing impairment may occur.

In Kentucky, the preterm birth rate in 2015 for Kentucky babies was 10.8%, higher than the national rate of 9.6%. Unfortunately, the preliminary report of preterm Kentucky birth rates for 2016 showed an increase to 11.3%.

A woman's pregnancy should last an average of 40 weeks. The last few weeks of pregnancy is very important to the development of the baby. Babies born before 37 weeks gestation are still vulnerable to problems associated with premature birth, including permanent disabilities. Babies born even 3-4 weeks early are more likely to have an increased risk of serious behavior and

learning problems, cerebral palsy and intellectual disability, mental illness and long-term disability as adults.

Preterm birth not only has a significant medical impact, but also contributes toward rising medical costs for families, employers, and taxpayers. In Kentucky, the average first year medical cost for a premature/low birth weight baby is \$49,033 compared to \$4,551 for a baby without complications.

“Improving birth outcomes throughout Kentucky reduces the risk of short-term and long-term complications associated with early delivery. With adequate prenatal care, pregnant women can increase the likelihood of carrying their baby to the full term of pregnancy,” said Henrietta Bada MD, MPH, Maternal and Child Health Director.

Many preterm births, especially late preterm births, are preventable with the following prevention methods:

- Avoid alcohol, tobacco use and secondhand smoke exposure
- Eat healthy foods and vitamins
- Talk to your doctor about a healthy exercise plan for you for a healthy weight throughout pregnancy
- Follow appropriate treatment for existing medical conditions
- Avoid induction of labor or cesarean deliveries, unless there is a medical indication that necessitates this procedure
- Wait at least 18 months between pregnancies

The Kentucky Department for Public Health is committed to advancing initiatives that ensure early access to prenatal care and prevention of preterm birth in Kentucky. All pregnant women are encouraged to seek prenatal care from a health care provider as soon as they find out they are pregnant and continue care throughout the course of their pregnancy.

It is important for women to know possible signs and symptoms of preterm labor such as:

- Change in type of vaginal discharge
- Increase in amount of discharge
- Pelvic or lower abdominal pressure
- Constant low, dull backache
- Mild abdominal cramps, with or without diarrhea
- Regular or frequent contractions or uterine tightening, often painless
- Ruptured membranes (your water breaks with a gush or a trickle of fluid)

To learn about how to prevent preterm birth of your baby, visit [www.marchofdimes.com](http://www.marchofdimes.com) or call the Department for Public Health at (502) 564-2154.

Interested in learning more about healthy Kentucky lifestyle? Through our 52 Weeks of Public Health campaign, the Kentucky Department for Public Health will spotlight public health issues as well as highlight services and resources available to Kentuckians statewide. Follow us on [Facebook](#) for your weekly tip.