



Prematurity Factsheet

What is Prematurity?

Prematurity has steadily increased over the past two decades. One out of eight babies is born prematurely in the United States. Preterm delivery can happen to any pregnant woman.

Preterm birth is any birth that occurs before the 37th completed week of pregnancy. Compared to other babies, preterm babies are more likely to face lifelong health problems or even to die in the first month of life, especially if they are born very preterm (less than 32 weeks gestation).

Premature Births in Kansas

In Kansas, approximately 3,800 babies are born premature each year. According to the March of Dimes 2010 National Premature Report Card*, Kansas received a “C” for its preterm birth rate of 11.2 percent. March of Dimes graded states by comparing each state’s rate of premature birth to the nation’s objective of 7.6 percent or less by 2010.

According to the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, in 2009, in Kansas:

- One in eleven babies (9.2 percent of live births) was born premature.
- Between 2000 (8.8 percent) and 2009, the rate of infants born premature increased nearly five percent.
- The rate of premature births was highest for non-Hispanic black infants (13.2 percent), followed by non-Hispanic whites (9.0 percent), non-Hispanic Asians (9.0 percent), non-Hispanic Native Americans (8.7 percent), and Hispanics (8.1 percent).
- Compared with singleton births (1 baby), multiple births were about 8 times more likely to be preterm.

What Can Be Done to Reduce the Risk for Premature Births?

Every pregnant woman should be considered at risk of preterm birth. Researchers continue to study preterm labor and birth. They have identified some risk factors, but still cannot predict which women will give birth too early. Having a risk factor does not mean a woman will have preterm labor or preterm birth.

Three groups of women are at greatest risk of preterm labor and birth:

- Women who have had a previous preterm birth
- Women who are pregnant with twins, triplets or more
- Women with certain uterine or cervical abnormalities

If a woman has any of these three risk factors, it’s especially important for her to know the signs and symptoms of preterm labor and what to do if they occur.

To help prevent preterm birth, women should:

- Know the warning signs of preterm labor.
- Get regular prenatal checkups.
- Reduce stress.
- Quit smoking, drinking alcohol or using illegal drugs.
- Avoid secondhand smoke.
- Call a healthcare provider if she feels burning or pain when urinating (possible sign of an infection that can increase the risk of preterm birth).

*Based on 2008 preliminary national data



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Lifestyle and Environmental Risks

Some studies have found that certain lifestyle factors may put a woman at greater risk of preterm labor. These factors include:

- Late or no prenatal care
- Smoking
- Drinking alcohol
- Using illegal drugs
- Exposure to the medication DES
- Domestic violence, including physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- Lack of social support
- Extremely high levels of stress
- Long working hours with long periods of standing

Medical Risks

Certain medical conditions during pregnancy may increase the likelihood that a woman will have preterm labor. These conditions include:

- Infections (urinary, vaginal, sexually transmitted; possibly others)
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Clotting disorders (thrombophilia)
- Bleeding from the vagina
- Certain birth defects in the baby
- Being pregnant with a single fetus after in vitro fertilization (IVF)
- Being underweight before pregnancy
- Obesity
- Short time period between pregnancies (less than 6-9 months between birth and the beginning of the next pregnancy)

Disparities

Researchers also have identified other risk factors. For instance, African-American women, women younger than 17 or older than 35, and poor women are at greater risk than other women. Experts do not fully understand why and how these factors increase the risk that a woman will have preterm labor or birth.

Resources

Kansas Blue Ribbon Panel recommendations which suggest further actions to reduce and prevent infant death:

www.kansasinfantmortality.org

March of Dimes Kansas Chapter

www.marchofdimes.com/kansas

SIDS Network of Kansas

www.sidsks.org/

References

Kansas Department of Health and Environment, "Kansas Annual Summary of Vital Statistics, 2009" http://www.kdheks.gov/hci/as/2009/AS_2009.pdf

March of Dimes "Who is at increased risk" http://www.marchofdimes.com/prematurity/index_about_5804.asp

March of Dimes Reference for Professionals "Preventing Preterm Births" http://www.marchofdimes.com/prematurity/index_professionals_5212.asp