

# Prematurity Awareness

## EACH NOVEMBER WE CELEBRATE Prematurity Awareness

Pregnancy is a time filled with hope and expectation. Every family hopes for an uncomplicated birth and a healthy baby. But sometimes the unexpected happens - and a baby is born early.

Every year in the U.S. more than 380,000 babies are born preterm, meaning that they were born before 37 weeks gestation - more than a month early. While babies who are born extremely preterm - sometimes as early as 22 weeks - are surviving, all preemies are vulnerable to medical and developmental complications.

While we are grateful for advances in neonatal care that allow more premature infants to survive and thrive, we know that we have more to learn. We need a better understanding of the factors that lead to preterm labor and delivery - and result in unacceptable disparities.



## Did You Know? Premies Aren't Just Tiny Newborns

Every baby is born vulnerable and immature. They rely on their caregivers to nurture and protect them as they adjust to life outside of the womb. But for babies who are born preterm, these effects are magnified. When a baby is born early they have to continue to grow and mature in an environment that is more challenging than in utero.

- Babies begin to learn to breathe in the womb. So preemies' lungs haven't had time to practice and mature so that they use oxygen effectively. Immature lungs can be easily damaged.
- Babies' brains reorganize and restructure dramatically in the final weeks of pregnancy. Premies can struggle to control their temperature, breathing, and heart rate. Brain bleeds are common.
- To eat well, preemies must master the rhythm of breathing and swallowing. Their immature stomachs and intestines take time to absorb nutrients and learn to fight infections.

Common Complications of Prematurity:

- chronic lung conditions
- feeding difficulties
- developmental delays

With support and early intervention the negative effects can be minimized

Prematurity is the leading cause of infant mortality and morbidity in the U.S.

Our preterm birth rate continues to climb. In 2017 it grew to 9.9%.

Celebrate World Prematurity Day  
November 17<sup>th</sup>

 National  
Perinatal  
Association

*Educate. Advocate. Integrate.*