Short- and Long-Term Effects of Preterm Birth

Preterm birth is the leading cause of newborn death. Advances in neonatal care and treatments for preterm babies have greatly increased the chances for survival of even the smallest babies.

But survival is not the only outcome measure. Babies born before 37 weeks are still vulnerable to increased risk for death and to many short- and long-term effects of premature birth.

All babies born preterm are at risk for serious health problems. Even babies born only four to six weeks early can have effects from the preterm birth such as breathing difficulties, feeding problems, jaundice and effects on brain functions.

Long-term effects of preterm birth

Preterm babies can suffer lifelong effects such as cerebral palsy, mental retardation, visual and hearing impairments, and poor health and growth.

Babies born only a few weeks early (late preterm, 34-36 weeks) often have long-term difficulties such as:

- Behavioral and social-emotional problems
- Learning difficulties
- Increased risk of conditions such as Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Increased risk for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)

Children born preterm are more likely to require early intervention and special education services.

Healthy Babies Are Worth the Wait® is a multifaceted partnership of the March of Dimes, the Johnson & Johnson Pediatric Institute and the Kentucky Department for Public Health. The primary goal of the initiative is a 15 percent reduction in the rate of “preventable” single preterm births – particularly
babies born late preterm (four to six weeks early) – in three targeted intervention sites in Kentucky: King’s Daughters Medical Center in Ashland, Trover Health System Regional Medical Center of Hopkins County and the University of Kentucky Albert B. Chandler Hospital in Lexington. Health care teams at each site provide mothers-to-be with an integrated approach of education, counseling and clinical care.

**For more information**

Kentucky Children’s Hospital is the only hospital in central Kentucky that offers a Level III NICU to care for the tiniest babies.

Call **1-800-333-8874** or visit our Web site at [ukhealthcare.uky.edu/obgyn](http://ukhealthcare.uky.edu/obgyn) or the following sites:

- [www.prematurityprevention.org](http://www.prematurityprevention.org)
- [www.marchofdimes.org](http://www.marchofdimes.org)
- [www.nacersano.org](http://www.nacersano.org)