

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET



Department of Health & Human Services

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Premature Birth

What is Premature Birth?

A premature birth is when a baby is born 3 or more weeks before it is due. Babies that are born too early are more likely to die before their first birthday or have life-long health problems. For a healthy baby, 40 weeks of pregnancy is best.

Who is at risk for Premature Birth?

You are more likely to deliver a baby early if you:

- Had previous premature labor, delivered a baby early, or had 3 or more miscarriages
- Are African American
- Are expecting more than one baby (twins or triplets)
- Have an infection like dental, urinary, vaginal or a sexually transmitted disease (STD)
- Smoke
- Weigh too little or too much (underweight or overweight)
- Have a health condition like high blood pressure, diabetes, asthma or depression

How Can I Prevent Premature Birth?

For all women:

- Get check-ups from your doctor and dentist every year
- Take a multi-vitamin that includes folic acid every day
- Quit smoking
- Talk to your doctor about ways to plan for pregnancy
- Eat a healthy diet and exercise daily

If you are pregnant now:

- See your doctor as soon as you know you are pregnant and keep every appointment
- Know the signs and symptoms of premature labor and what to do (see back)

Know the Warning Signs of Premature Labor

Premature labor is when you go into labor 3 or more weeks before your baby is due. Some warning signs to watch for are:

- Low, dull backache
- Pain in the lower belly or thigh
- Cramps that feel like your period
- Cramps with or without diarrhea
- Contractions or tightening with or without pain
- Feeling that baby is pushing down
- Clear, pink or brownish fluid from the vagina
- Change in vaginal discharge

If you have any of these signs, do not wait. Call your doctor or go to the hospital right away.

For more information on Premature Birth, call (248) 858-1406 or toll free 1 (800) 848-5533.

For additional copies, visit our website at www.oakgov.com/health.