PRETERM BIRTH CAN BE PREVENTED  
WITH A FEW PROVEN TREATMENTS, LANCET ARTICLE SAYS

Global Partners Challenge 39 High-Income Countries

WHITE PLAINS, N.Y., NOV. 16, 2012 – Lowering preterm birth rates by an average of 5 percent across 39 high-resource countries, including the United States, by 2015 would prevent prematurity for 58,000 babies a year, a group of international experts said today.

In an article published in The Lancet to coincide with the second annual World Prematurity Day, the expert group say prevention of preterm birth also could save billions in economic costs.

“Governments and health professionals in these 39 countries need to know that wider use of proven interventions can help more women have healthy pregnancies and healthy babies,” says lead author Hannah H. Chang, M.D., PhD, a consultant for the Boston Consulting Group. “A 5 percent reduction in the preterm birth rate is an important first step.”

“The preterm birth rate in the U.S. currently is on the decline, but for this trend to continue, it’s critical that high-resource countries such as ours focus vigorously on prevention,” says Christopher Howson, PhD, vice president of Global Programs for the March of Dimes, a co-author.

The authors of The Lancet article say that five proven interventions, when combined, would lower the preterm rate across 39 countries from an average 9.6 percent of live births to 9.1 percent, and save about $3 billion in health and economic costs:

- eliminating early cesarean deliveries and inductions of labor unless medically necessary;
- decreasing multiple embryo transfers during assisted reproductive technologies;
- helping women quit smoking;
- providing progesterone supplementation to women with high risk pregnancies;
- cervical cerclage for high-risk women with short cervix.

“The means to reduce the risk of preterm birth by 5 percent are already available,” says Catherine Y. Spong, M.D., Associate Director for Extramural Research, Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. “Continued research into the causes of preterm birth has the potential to reduce the proportion of infants born preterm even further.”
Preterm birth, birth before 37 weeks completed gestation, is the leading cause of newborn
death, and babies who survive an early birth often face a lifetime of health challenges, including
breathing problems, cerebral palsy, motor and intellectual disabilities and others.

The 5 percent figure builds on recommendations from the May 2012 publication Born Too Soon:
The Global Action Report on Preterm Birth, which presented the first-ever preterm birth data for 184
countries and outlined steps that all countries could take to help prevent preterm birth and care for
affected newborns. About 15 million babies worldwide are born preterm each year and more than one
million of these die as a direct result of their early birth. According to Born Too Soon, the U.S. preterm
birth rate ranked 131st out of 184 countries.

On November 17, the March of Dimes and its global partners will mark World Prematurity Day
by asking supporters to post a story, photo, or video at http://www.facebook.com/WorldPrematurityDay. The page features an interactive world map that
allows visitors to see the home place of each story. Also on Nov. 17, the Empire State Building in New
York City will be shining in purple light to symbolize hope for a healthy start for babies. World
Prematurity Day is part of the Every Woman Every Child movement to improve the health of mothers
and children led by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

“Preventing preterm births: analysis of trends and potential reductions with interventions in 39
countries with very high human development index,” by Hannah H. Chang and colleagues of the Born
Too Soon preterm prevention analysis group (a team from the March of Dimes, the National Institute of
Child Health & Human Development, Boston Consulting Group, World Health Organization, Save the
Children, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Global Alliance to Prevent Prematurity and
Stillbirth, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation), will be published online first in The Lancet on Friday,
November 16.

The March of Dimes Prematurity Prevention Campaign is made possible by support from
Destination Maternity, Watson Pharmaceuticals, the WellPoint Foundation, and gifts from millions of
individual donors.

The March of Dimes is the leading nonprofit organization for pregnancy and baby health. With
chapters nationwide, the March of Dimes works to improve the health of babies by preventing birth
defects, premature birth and infant mortality. For the latest resources and information, visit
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