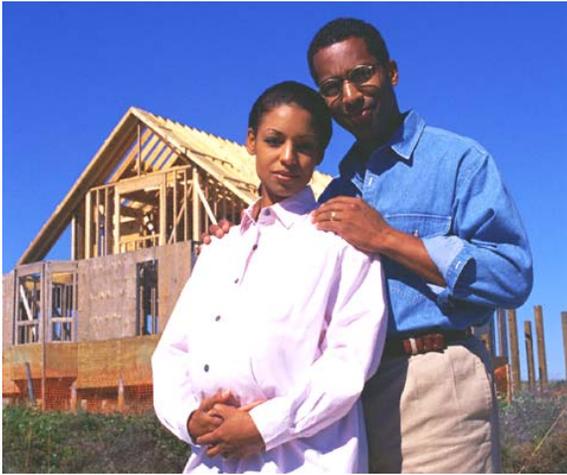


African-American Women and Their Babies at a Higher Risk for Pregnancy and Birth Complications



Preterm, or premature, delivery is the most frequent cause of infant mortality, accounting for more than one third of all infant deaths during the first year of life. The infant mortality rate among black infants is 2.4 times higher than that of white infants, primarily due to preterm birth. In the United States, the risk of preterm birth for Non-Hispanic black women is approximately 1.5 times the rate seen in white women.

Preterm birth is when a baby is born before 37 complete weeks of pregnancy. Preterm infants who live beyond the first year may suffer more because it is also the leading cause of severe neurologic disability, including cerebral palsy and intellectual disabilities. In addition to the physical and emotional impact resulting from preterm births, recent estimates of the economic costs to society provided by the Institutes of Medicine suggest that at least \$26 billion is spent each year for hospitalizations of preterm infants. This estimation of cost does not include the cost of re-hospitalizations and long-term care.

“In terms of the health of women and infants, preterm birth is an important public health priority,” said Dr. Eve Lackritz, Chief, Maternal and Infant Health Branch at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). “Preterm delivery is the leading cause of hospitalization among pregnant women, is the most frequent cause of infant deaths, and is a major contributor to the racial disparity in the infant mortality rate.”

Despite continuing efforts to understand and prevent preterm birth, the rate has increased more than 20 percent since 1990 and more than 36 percent since the early 1980s. In 2006 the preterm birth rate rose to 12.8 percent of all births up from 12.7 percent in 2005. This percentile equates to more than 545,000 preterm deliveries out of the 4,265,555 births registered in the United States in 2006; a statistically disproportionate

percentage of which were births to non-Hispanic Black women.

A major challenge in decreasing the rate of preterm birth is the lack of knowledge about the causes and effective strategies for prevention. No screening tests exist to accurately identify women who deliver preterm; and approximately one-half of preterm births occur in women with no known risk factors. Explanations presented for the increase in preterm delivery are many and include the rise in the rate of multiple births, the increased use of procedures to manage labor and delivery such as induction of labor and cesarean delivery earlier in the pregnancy, and changes in maternal lifestyle and health.

CDC is engaged in a number of strategies attempting to reduce the rate of preterm births, such as collaborating with outside investigators and state health departments and conducting ongoing research to better understand the social, behavioral, community, genetic, and biologic factors associated with preterm birth and racial disparities, in an effort to identify new opportunities for prevention.

Pregnancy is an exciting time. Knowing that you are doing all you can to stay healthy during pregnancy and give your baby a healthy start in life will help you to have peace of mind. Be sure to see your doctor and get prenatal care as soon as you think you're pregnant. For more information on healthy pregnancy, call 1-800-CDC-INFO, or read more about this topic on CDC's website at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/bd/abc.htm> and for more information on preterm birth go to <http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/MaternalInfantHealth/PBP.htm>.

Important Steps Women Can Take to Get Ready for a Healthy Pregnancy:

- Take a vitamin with 400 micrograms (mcg) folic acid every day.
- Avoid alcohol, tobacco, and street drugs.
- Keep hands clean by washing them often with soap and water to prevent infections.
- See a health care professional regularly. Talk with the health care professional about any medical problems (such as obesity, diabetes, seizures, etc.) and medicine use (both prescription and over-the-counter).
- Ask about avoiding any substances at work or at home that might be harmful to a developing baby.
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet.
- Avoid unpasteurized (raw) milk and foods made from it.
- Avoid eating raw or undercooked meat.