Preterm or premature birth means childbirth before the 37th week of pregnancy.

The earlier in pregnancy a baby is born, the more likely they are to have health problems.

Babies born before 34 weeks of pregnancy are most likely to have health problems.

Babies born before 34 and 37 weeks of pregnancy are also at increased risk for prematurity-related health problems.

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Overall preterm birth rates in the United States increased last year and they rose for women of color.

10.5% of babies in the U.S. are born preterm.

Around 384,000 babies were born preterm in 2021.

United States annual preterm birth rates have increased from 10.1% to 10.5%.

43 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico had an increase.

9 states and Puerto Rico had an increase greater than 11.5%.

1 state had a drop.

The biggest risks for preterm birth are:

- Having had a previous preterm birth
- Being pregnant with multiples
- Having problems with your uterus or cervix

Race impacts risk:

Black and American Indian/Alaska Native women are 62% more likely to give birth preterm than white women.

Race and economic status continue to impact birth outcomes for moms and babies.

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Location impacts risk:

Overall, the U.S. received a “D+” grade on the 2022 March of Dimes Report Card, but prematurity varied widely by state. Vermont was the only state to receive an “A” grade in 2021.

“F” grades were earned by a cluster of states in the southeastern U.S. — Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Georgia and South Carolina — plus Oklahoma, West Virginia and Puerto Rico.

Preterm babies are at increased risk for long-term health problems, such as:

- Physical or intellectual disabilities
- Chronic lung disease
- Blinding
- Neurological issues
- Digestive disorders
- Cardiac problems
- Hearing loss

Prematurity/low birth weight is a leading cause of death for U.S. infants.

Take steps to learn more about preterm birth if you’re pregnant:

- Find a prenatal care provider
- Ask your prenatal care provider how to have a healthy pregnancy
- Recognize the signs and symptoms of preterm labor
- Call your healthcare provider right away or go to the hospital if symptoms appear

Some women have no risk factors and still deliver preterm.

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