Reducing Premature Birth
What Black Women Need to Know

The rate of babies born too soon to Black women is 48% higher than other women. Prematurity (meaning a baby born before 37 weeks of pregnancy) can cause a range of challenges, from learning problems to loss of hearing and vision. Premature birth is the leading cause of infant death in the U.S. before a baby’s first birthday. If you’ve already had a baby born before 37 weeks, you are especially high risk for having another baby born too soon. However, there are many things you can do to help your baby have a healthy start!

How You Can Reduce Your Risk of Premature Birth:

♦ Take a multi-vitamin with folic acid every day if you are of child-bearing age.
♦ Wait 18 months after the birth of your baby to get pregnant again.
♦ Go to the doctor as soon as you think you’re pregnant.
♦ Keep your doctor appointments, even if you feel fine.
♦ Smoking is linked to low birth weight. Drinking alcohol or using drugs while you’re pregnant can also hurt you and your baby. Ask your doctor for help. There are treatment programs that can help you and baby stay healthy.
♦ Get treated for health conditions, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, depression and thyroid problems before, during and after pregnancy.
♦ Try your best to maintain a healthy weight by eating more fruits and vegetables and keeping physically active before, during and after pregnancy.
♦ Let your partner, friends and family know you need help. Having a baby can be tough!

If You Have Had a Premature Birth, Ask Your Provider:

♦ To measure your cervix (the opening to your womb) when you are about 20 weeks pregnant.
♦ If progesterone shots might better help your baby reach full term.
♦ If taking low-dose aspirin can keep you and your baby healthy.

To Learn More:
Visit www.marchofdimes.org. To find support in your area, visit Black Infant Health at cdph.ca.gov/BIH or call your community resource help hotline at 211.
Each year in California, almost 3,000 African-American babies are born before 37 weeks gestation. The preterm birth rate among Black women is 48% higher than the rate among all other women. Prematurity can cause a range of problems, from learning disabilities to chronic lung disease, vision problems and hearing loss. We don’t fully understand why babies are born too early. But, here’s what we do know:

**Preterm Birth Risks**
- Women who have had a preterm birth in the past are more likely to experience future preterm births.
- Women who don’t space their pregnancies at least 18 months apart are more likely to have a preterm birth.
- Women who are under or overweight before pregnancy are predisposed to delivering a baby early.

**Preterm Birth Interventions That Work**
- Discuss the benefits of spacing births to at least 18 months between birth to conception of the next baby.
- Provide 17P (*alpha-hydroxyprogesterone caproate*) to women with a prior preterm birth.
- Provide low-dose aspirin to women at risk for preeclampsia.
- Refer women who smoke to smoking cessation programs.
- Utilize assisted reproductive technologies to reduce multiple births.
- Provide vaginal progesterone or cerclage for a short cervix.
- Eliminate non-medically indicated deliveries prior to 39 weeks.
- Provide prenatal care in group settings.

To Learn More, visit [www.marchofdimes.org](http://www.marchofdimes.org). To find a Black Infant Health program in your community, visit [cdph.ca.gov/BIH](http://cdph.ca.gov/BIH).

Sources: 1 California Department of Public Health, 2013 Birth Statistical Master File; 2 [www.marchofdimes.org](http://www.marchofdimes.org);