



Preventing Preterm Birth

A Guide for Pregnant Women

Healthy pregnancies last about 40 weeks. Babies born before 37 weeks can have serious problems. This guide tells you how to reduce the chances that your baby will be born too soon.

The Facts about Birth Before 37 Weeks

- Preterm birth, or having a baby before 37 weeks of pregnancy, is the #1 cause of newborn deaths in Ohio.
- One in every 8 babies is born too soon—early delivery can happen to any pregnant woman.
- Doctors can treat some women with a medicine called progesterone to greatly reduce the chances they will have their baby too soon.

Preterm birth occurs when a baby is born before 37 weeks of pregnancy. Full-term birth is 40 weeks.



Questions and Answers about Preterm Birth

I HEAR ABOUT BABIES BORN EARLY ALL THE TIME. I THOUGHT IT WAS OKAY?

Babies born at or very near 40 weeks are more likely to be healthy. Babies born before 37 weeks are more likely to have serious health problems. Some even die. Babies born too soon are called preterm babies, or “preemies.” They may have to spend their first weeks or months of life in the hospital. They may face years or even a lifetime with health issues, learning difficulties and other problems.

HOW COMMON IS THIS? Early delivery can happen to any pregnant woman. About 1 in every 8 babies in the United States is born early. The rate is higher in Ohio. Most preterm births happen suddenly and without warning.

I DO NOT THINK THIS IS LIKELY TO HAPPEN TO ME. DO I STILL NEED TO BE CONCERNED? Yes. In about half of preterm births, the mothers had no warning signs. You should learn the symptoms of preterm labor.

MY LAST BABY WAS BORN EARLY. CAN I KEEP THAT FROM HAPPENING AGAIN?

Your doctor can give you progesterone, a treatment that helps reduce the risk of early birth in women who have had it happen before. Progesterone safely helps women like you deliver their babies closer to full term.

I HAVE NEVER HAD A PRETERM BIRTH. WOULD PROGESTERONE HELP ME TOO?

Doctors will give progesterone to women who have a short cervix. Your cervix is the opening to your uterus, where your baby is growing inside you. The cervix is tightly closed during pregnancy, and opens during labor to let the baby come out. If you have a short cervix, there is a chance it can open before your baby is ready to be born. A short cervix can be found with an ultrasound. It is a painless test that uses the same machine that takes pictures of your unborn baby. Ask your doctor about this.



Progesterone May Help You Prevent an Early Birth

Progesterone is a hormone (or a natural substance) that is made by women's bodies. Progesterone helps keep the pregnancy going. It is called the pregnancy hormone. Some pregnant women need more progesterone than their bodies make. Doctors can give these women extra progesterone to help them carry their babies to full term (40 weeks).

Ask your doctor if progesterone treatment is right for you.

PROGESTERONE TREATMENT OPTIONS

Your doctor can give you progesterone in different ways, including:

- One shot per week or
- Vaginal suppository every night or
- Vaginal capsule every night or
- Vaginal gel every night

Knowing the Facts Can Help Your Baby

YOU ARE MORE LIKELY TO DELIVER EARLY IF YOU:

- Had a preterm birth before
- Have had a miscarriage
- Have a short cervix
- Are African American/Black
- Are pregnant with more than one baby
- Have had infections during your pregnancy
- Are very overweight or underweight
- Smoke, have too much stress or a poor diet
- Have gum disease or certain other health problems

TO DECREASE YOUR CHANCES OF A PRETERM BIRTH:

- Stop smoking
- Avoid alcohol and drugs
- Visit your doctor at the start and then regularly while pregnant
- Know your risk for preterm birth
- Understand the warning signs of preterm labor
- Talk to your doctor about progesterone if you have a short cervix, have miscarried between 16–36 weeks, or have had a preterm birth.

WARNING SIGNS OF PRETERM LABOR:

Preterm labor can begin suddenly and without warning, and the cause is not known. Contact your doctor immediately if any of these things happen:

- Thin watery discharge
- Pressure between your legs or low in your belly
- Low, dull backache
- Cramping like your period is going to start
- Feeling like something is not right
- Leaking fluid or bleeding from your vagina
- Sharp pains, contractions, tightening or balling up of your abdomen

Steps You Can Take to Help Your Baby

THIRD STEP

Ask your doctor if progesterone treatment is right for you.

SECOND STEP

Talk to your doctor about your risk for preterm birth.

FIRST STEP

Understand the facts and ask questions about ways to have a healthy baby.

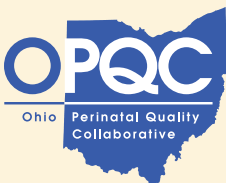


If you are pregnant or planning to have a baby, you should learn the facts about preterm birth. Talk to your doctor about steps you can take to increase your chances of delivering a healthy, full-term baby. Start to talk about this early on.

Resources

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT PRETERM BIRTH AND PROGESTERONE GO TO THESE WEB SITES:

- **Ohio Perinatal Quality Collaborative:** <https://www.opqc.net/>
- **March of Dimes:** <http://www.marchofdimes.com/>
- **Ohio Department of Health:** <http://www.odh.ohio.gov/>



The Ohio Perinatal Quality Collaborative includes hundreds of clinicians, 105 hospitals and clinics, the Ohio Department of Health, the March of Dimes and other stakeholders around the state dedicated to improving perinatal health in Ohio. To that end, OPQC members use scientifically proven methods to reduce preterm births in Ohio, which sees more infants die each year than most other states.

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