

# Preterm Labor and Preterm Birth in Kansas

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Preterm labor is a condition where labor starts before the 37th week of gestation. In the U.S., preterm birth has risen by 10 percent in the last decade and more than 30 percent in the last 20 years.

Women most at risk fall into three general categories:

- Those with a previous preterm birth
- Women carrying multiple fetuses (twins, triplets, etc.)
- Women with certain uterine or cervical abnormalities

What should pregnant women, particularly those who fall into the three high-risk categories, be considering? First, they should know the cardinal symptoms of preterm labor. They are as follows:

- uterine contractions at least every 10 minutes apart
- changes in vaginal discharge (e.g., leakage or bleeding)
- a feeling of pelvic pressure like the baby is pushing down
- low, dull backache
- menstrual-like cramping
- abdominal cramping that may or may not be accompanied by diarrhea

If the symptoms of preterm labor in pregnant women occur between 20 weeks and less than 37 weeks of gestation, they should be instructed to call their healthcare provider or go to the hospital for further evaluation if they think they are having preterm labor.

Pregnant women can attempt to calm the symptoms by first lying on their left side for an hour and drinking two to three glasses of water or juice only. If the symptoms get worse or persist after an hour, they should call their healthcare provider or go to the hospital for further evaluation.

Preterm birth is also the leading cause of infant mortality, cerebral palsy, blindness, deafness and retardation according to information presented at the March of Dimes Symposium on Quality Improvement to Prevent Prematurity, October 2009.

The preterm birth rate, according to the 2005 Kansas vital statistics data, was measured at 12.2 percent (4,680 preterm births) which is lower than the national rate of 12.7 percent. This is an increase in Kansas of 23 percent between 1995 and 2005 in preterm birth. In addition, this is 60 percent higher than the Healthy People 2010 objective of 7.6 percent.

The Greater Kansas Chapter of the March of Dimes, KDHE, the Perinatal Association of Kansas, the Kansas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Kansas Maternal Child Health Council, the Kansas Public Health Association and many other invested Kansas organizations and individuals are helping to prevent preterm birth by joining the March of Dimes Prematurity Campaign.

Together, we can make a difference in helping to prevent preterm birth. For more information visit: [www.marchofdimes.com/prematurity/index\\_about\\_5809.asp](http://www.marchofdimes.com/prematurity/index_about_5809.asp).



**Q.** 2009 H1N1 Influenza Shots and Pregnant Women: Why does the CDC advise pregnant women to receive the 2009 H1N1 influenza (flu) vaccine (shot)? Will the seasonal flu shot also protect against the 2009 H1N1 flu? Are there flu vaccines that pregnant women should not get?

**A.** Answers to these questions and more for your patients can be found at: [www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/providers\\_qa.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/providers_qa.htm).