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P r e m a t u r i t y

It's supposed to take nine months for a baby to be born; yet every day in the United States more than 1,305 babies arrive too soon (before 37 completed weeks). In 2001, the overall preterm birth rate was 11.9%. In addition, preterm birth rates in the United States were highest among infants born to black mothers (17.5%) compared to other racial/ethnic groups. Teens 17 and younger have the highest rates of preterm birth compared to the overall preterm birth rate.

Premature births are escalating. Between 1981 and 2001 the rate of infants born preterm in the United States increased more than 27%. Prematurity is the second leading cause of infant death in the United States and the leading cause of death among black babies. Premature infants are at a higher risk of developing lifelong health problems than babies born after 37 weeks. One-half of all neurologic disabilities in children can be attributed to prematurity.

There are many simple things a pregnant woman can do to care for herself and her baby during her pregnancy. And, knowing the signs and symptoms of preterm labor, and what to do, is critical for getting the care needed if a woman does go into labor too soon. So if you know someone who is pregnant or planning to be, share the following important information.

A pregnant woman should:

- Get early and regular prenatal care. Prenatal care should begin as soon as a woman knows she is pregnant. In fact, it is wise to visit a health care provider even before becoming pregnant. And, make sure she goes to every appointment.

Take good care of herself by:

- Not smoking, not drinking alcohol, not taking drugs and avoiding secondhand smoke
- Eating regularly and nutritiously
- Resting, when possible
- Drinking lots of water
- Taking a prenatal multivitamin (with iron and folic acid) every day. In fact, a woman should begin taking prenatal multivitamins before conception
- Exercising regularly – with her health care provider's okay
- Avoiding stress and stressful situations

Learn the signs and symptoms of preterm labor:

- *Contractions* every 10 minutes or more often
- *Clear, pink or brownish fluid* (water) leaking from the vagina
- *Pelvic pressure* – the feeling that the baby is pushing down
- *Low, dull backache*
- *Menstrual-like cramps* (cramps that feel like her period)
- *Abdominal cramps*, with or without diarrhea

Remember: a woman doesn't need to have all these signs to have preterm labor. She should call her health care provider immediately even if she only has one.

P r e m a t u r i t y

Activity A – Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) Tour

Time:

Approximately 1 hour

Supplies:

The items below will vary depending on your resources:

Transportation

March of Dimes video *Saving Babies: Premature Birth – A Silent Crisis* (You can purchase this video by calling the March of Dimes Fulfillment Center at 800-367-6630. Item number: 41-1750-02. Cost \$10.)

Instructions

1. Contact the local March of Dimes office to coordinate a visit to a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) in a local hospital to determine hospital rules and regulations for young adult tours in neonatal units.
2. Coordinate transportation from Project Alpha program site to hospital. Be sure parents or guardians sign consent forms. Confirm a suitable facility available to hold the tour. If transportation is needed, identify drivers and hand out their assignments for pickups and delivery.
3. Have a NICU professional talk to the youths about prematurity before the tour.
4. Tour local hospital NICUs with 5-10 youths to increase awareness, share knowledge and see the premature babies.
5. If NICU tours are not allowed in your local hospital, show the March of Dimes video *Saving Babies: Premature Birth – A Silent Crisis*. The video is 6 minutes long.
6. Share personal stories about someone you know who was born premature and the struggles of the child and his/her family.
7. Have a medical professional share information on the possible risk factors for preterm labor and premature birth: including racial/ethnic disparities, stress and sexually transmitted diseases.
8. Discuss the health issues associated with premature births. In addition to mortality, prematurity is a major determinant of illness and disability among infants, including developmental delays, chronic respiratory problems and vision and hearing impairment.

Prematurity

Activity B – Game: Prematurity and Pregnancy -- Myth or Fact?

Time:

15 minutes

Supplies:

Note cards containing Questions and Answers

Instructions:

FACILITATOR NOTE:

Before playing the game, review the March of Dimes Web site on prematurity to learn the facts. <http://www.marchofdimes.com/prematurity/>

Game format is similar to “Family Feud”

1. Divide the class into two teams.
2. See example game questions below. Shuffle the “Myth or Fact?” game cards.
3. One player from each team comes to the front of the room.
4. Read the statement on the card. The first of the two players to answer “myth” or “fact” *and* explain why correctly, gets to keep that game card for their team.
5. If the player cannot give a correct explanation, the other player is allowed to answer and possibly steal the card.
6. Read the answer and information on the card.
7. Repeat the same steps for each set of players from the two teams until all the cards have been read or until time runs out.
8. The team with the most cards wins first prize.
9. The runners-up win a consolation prize.

Activity B – Game: Prematurity and Pregnancy -- Myth or Fact?

Myth or Fact?

In 2001, the percentage of babies born prematurely was nearly 12%, the highest rate ever reported.

Fact!**Myth or Fact?**

Very premature babies (born at or before 32 weeks) who survive are more likely to suffer lifelong consequences, including cerebral palsy, mental retardation, lung disease, vision and hearing loss.

Fact!**Myth or Fact?**

Premature birth rates are lower among teenagers.

Myth!

In 2000, the preterm birth rate among women 25-29 was 10.6%, while, for ages 17 and under, the preterm birth rate was 15.7%.

Myth or Fact?

The first time a female is pregnant, she can't have a premature baby.

Myth!

This is not true! Anytime a woman is pregnant she is at risk for premature birth.