



Premature Births: Know the Facts and Stats

Note: Recent studies have shown that women with periodontal disease are at three to five times greater risk of preterm birth than those who are periodontally healthy.

- Premature (or preterm) babies are born too soon - before 37 completed weeks of gestation.
- In 2001, the preterm birth rate was 11.9%, reflecting more than 476,000 newborns and the highest rate ever reported for the U.S. This represents 1 in 8 babies in the U.S. born prematurely.
- The rate of preterm birth increased 27% between 1981 and 2001 from 9.4% to 11.9%.
- On an average day in the U.S., 1,305 babies are born preterm (before 37 weeks), 213 are born very preterm (before 32 weeks).
- Periodontal disease has been associated with preterm births in some studies.
- Among racial/ethnic subgroups, preterm birth rates were highest among infants born to black mothers (17.5%) in 2001.
- Major risk factors associated with increasing rates of preterm delivery include multiple births, advanced maternal age, induced deliveries and additional factors as yet unknown.
- Preterm labor/delivery is the number one obstetrical challenge in the U.S.
- In 2000 prematurity/low birthweight was the leading cause of neonatal mortality in the U.S., accounting for 23% of deaths in the first month of life.
- Preterm birth is a leading challenge in pediatrics, accounting for substantial long-term disabilities such as mental retardation, cerebral palsy, vision and hearing problems, and chronic lung disease.
- Causes of nearly half of all preterm births are unknown.
- Preterm labor can happen to any pregnant woman.