

# Percentage of premature births continues to drop in the U.S.

By ACSH Staff — November 7, 2014



The percentage of women giving birth prematurely in the United States

has dropped to <sup>[1]</sup>11.4 percent in 2013 - about 450,000 babies - says the [March of Dimes premature births report card](#) <sup>[2]</sup> the lowest percentage in 17 years. About [231,000 fewer babies](#) <sup>[3]</sup> have been born prematurely since 2006. However, the U.S. still maintains its C grade, as the current percentage of premature births is still far from the goal of 9.6 percent.

One reason for this drop is that women and health professionals are becoming more informed about the benefits of waiting until labor begins naturally, rather than having labor induced early. Babies born even just a few weeks early (e.g., at 37-38 weeks) are still more likely to have complications than babies born at 39 weeks, and infants born prematurely suffer an [increased risk of adverse health effects](#) <sup>[4]</sup> that may continue into adulthood.

The report card, which is based on CDC data, also noted that women who are uninsured are almost twice as likely to give birth prematurely, as are women who smoke. There are also differing percentages among racial and ethnic groups, with the highest percentage in black women at almost 17 percent, compared to almost 12 percent in Hispanic women and about 10 percent in white women.

The 9.6 percent premature births goal, set for 2020, was determined by using published research that estimated the maximum achievable benefits of applying premature birth prevention strategies, such as smoking cessation programs and preventing medically unnecessary cesarean sections and labor inductions before 39 weeks of pregnancy.

ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross says, The message that choosing to deliver just a few weeks early can have detrimental effects for both mother and baby should continue to be emphasized by physicians when discussing childbirth with their patients. Furthermore, this report highlights the need for targeted educational messages geared towards those groups that are more likely to

deliver prematurely.

---

COPYRIGHT © 1978-2016 BY THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON SCIENCE AND HEALTH

---

**Source URL:** <https://www.acsh.org/news/2014/11/07/percentage-premature-births-continues-drop-u-s>

**Links**

[1] <http://www.npr.org/blogs/health/2014/11/06/362010022/fewer-babies-are-born-prematurely-but-many-still-suffer>

[2] <http://www.marchofdimes.org/materials/premature-birth-report-card-united-states.pdf>

[3] <http://www.foxnews.com/health/2014/11/06/us-preterm-births-fall-to-lowest-rate-in-17-years-report-says/?&>

[4] <http://acsh.org/2011/09/surprising-uptick-in-mortality-for-premature-babies-when-they-grow-up/>