

news release

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OKLAHOMA CELEBRATES FIVE-YEAR IMPROVEMENT IN PRETERM BIRTH RATE

OKLAHOMA CITY, OK, Nov. 13, 2012 – Since 2006, Oklahoma lowered its preterm birth rate, from 13.9 to 13.2 percent, and the rate of late preterm births from 10.0 to 9.4 percent, giving more babies a healthy start in life and contributing to the national trend showing five years of improvement. Even though Oklahoma lowered its preterm birth rate, however, it is not enough to change its grade, which remains a “D” on the March of Dimes Premature Birth Report Card.

“We’re proud that our state’s preterm birth rate is improving, thanks to the work of the March of Dimes and our partners. Oklahoma’s progress means that more babies are being born healthy, excess health care costs are being reduced, and families are being spared the heartache of having a baby born too soon,” said Belinda Rogers, State Program Director, March of Dimes Oklahoma Chapter. “To continue this progress for mothers and babies, the Oklahoma State Department of Health and the March of Dimes have set a goal to reduce premature birth by at least 8 percent between 2009 and 2014.”

In Oklahoma, the March of Dimes and other partners are supporting the *Every Week Counts* collaborative which works with participating birthing hospitals to reduce non-medically indicated scheduled cesareans and inductions before 39 weeks of pregnancy. Ninety percent of Oklahoma birthing hospitals now participate in the program, resulting in a 66 percent decrease in early, elective scheduled births in the program’s first year. Every Week Counts is part of the statewide “*Preparing for a Lifetime, It’s Everyone’s Responsibility*” initiative to reduce infant mortality in Oklahoma.

“We commend the hospitals that are participating in *Every Week Counts* for their commitment to reducing non-medically indicated scheduled deliveries before 39 weeks gestation to help Moms

deliver healthy full term babies,” said Barbara O’Brien, Program Director, Office of Perinatal Quality Improvement, The University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center.

Oklahoma is part of a national trend toward improving preterm birth rates. Forty states, including Oklahoma, saw improvement in their preterm birth rates between 2010 and 2011. On the 2012 Report Card, 16 states got a better grade. Nationwide, the largest declines in preterm birth occurred among babies born at 34 to 36 weeks of pregnancy, but the improvement was across the board. Nationally, every racial and ethnic group benefitted, and the preterm birth rates for babies born at all stages of pregnancy improved.

Oklahoma earned a star on the report card for lowering the late preterm birth rate. Several factors contribute to improved infant health in Oklahoma. These improvements mean not just healthier babies, but also a potential savings in health care and economic costs to society. The March of Dimes attributed the improved rates to an expansion of successful programs and interventions, including actions by state health officials here and in 47 other states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, who formally set goals to lower their preterm birth rates 8 percent by 2014 from their 2009 rate.

“We will continue to work together to improve access to health care, help women quit smoking and, through our Healthy Babies Are Worth the Wait consumer education campaign, encourage women and health care providers to avoid scheduling a delivery before 39 weeks of pregnancy unless medically necessary,” said Rogers.

The United States again received a “C” on the March of Dimes Report Card. Grades are based on comparing each state’s and the nation’s 2011 preliminary preterm birth rates with the March of Dimes 2020 goal of 9.6 percent of all live births. The U.S. preterm birth rate is 11.7 percent, a decline of more than 8 percent from the peak of 12.8 percent in 2006. The Report Card information for the U.S. and states will be available online at: www.marchofdimes.com/reportcard.

Preterm birth, birth before 37 completed weeks of pregnancy, is a serious health problem that costs the United States more than \$26 billion annually, according to the Institute of Medicine. It is the leading cause of newborn death, and babies who survive an early birth often face the risk of lifetime health challenges, such as breathing problems, cerebral palsy, intellectual disabilities and others. “Even babies born just a few weeks early have higher rates of hospitalization and illness than full-term infants. At least 39 weeks of pregnancy are important to a baby’s health because many important organs, including the brain and lungs, are not completely developed until then,” said O’Brien.

The March of Dimes is the leading nonprofit organization for pregnancy and baby health. With chapters nationwide, the March of Dimes works to improve the health of babies by preventing birth

defects, premature birth and infant mortality. For the latest resources and information, visit marchofdimes.com or nacersano.org. Find us on [Facebook](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#).

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