

Alabama ranks number 50 with regard to preterm births according to a news release distributed today by the Alabama Chapter of the March of Dimes and supported by The Alabama Department of Public Health, The Jefferson County Health Department, The Association of Women's Health Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses, and the Alabama Academy of Pediatrics. The report card is a part of a national study that compared states in three areas: the number of women who were uninsured, the number of women who smoked and the number of late preterm deliveries. Alabama, which had a preterm rate of 16.7 percent, received an "F" ranking as did the vast majority of other southern states.

This report could generate calls from local reporters asking about your hospital's rate of preterm births. Please know that in addition to the statewide report card, the Alabama Department of Public Health publishes hospital-specific, C-Section rates on its Web site. Go to www.adph.org/healthstats <<http://www.adph.org/healthstats>> , click on "Pregnancy/Birth," and then on "General." Scroll down to "Births by Method of Delivery."

The following are some message points you might use should you get a media inquiry:

* Alabama's hospitals are committed to providing quality care to mothers and their babies and will continue to work with physicians as they identify best practices and seek guidance from their respective professional organizations on these issues.

* We, like the other organizations, are concerned about Alabama's preterm births and more importantly our rising infant mortality rate. Hospitals are very interested in partnering with organizations such as the March of Dimes and the Alabama Department of Public Health, along with Alabama's physicians to address the socio-economic issues that impact Alabama's deliveries, such as the troubling rates of obesity, smoking, teenage pregnancies and the lack of prenatal care. These and other issues appear to be plaguing not only Alabama, but most of the other Southern states.

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL NOV. 12, 2008

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NATION GETS A "D"; ALABAMA Receives AN "F"

MARCH OF DIMES RELEASES PREMATURE BIRTH REPORT CARD

Press Conference 10 AM, November 12, 2008, Jefferson County Health Department, 1400 6th Avenue S., Birmingham, AL

(BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA, NOV. 12, 2008) - The United States is failing hundreds of thousands of its youngest citizens on the day they are born, according to the March of Dimes. Alabama faces a crisis level of premature births that is driving up health care costs and special education budgets; preventive action is needed starting now. The March of Dimes will call for immediate action at a press conference at 10 a.m. on Nov. 12 at the Jefferson County Health Department in Birmingham.

In the first of what will be an annual Premature Birth Report Card, the nation received a "D" and not a single state earned an "A," when the March of Dimes compared actual preterm birth rates to the national Healthy People 2010 objective. The grade of F indicates how far Alabama, with a preterm birth rate of 16.7, is from the Healthy People 2010 objective of 7.6 percent of all live births. Latest available data (2005) show that the national preterm birth rate is 12.7 percent.

The only state to earn a "B" was Vermont. Eight states earned a "C," 23 states earned a "D," and 18 states plus Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia got failing grades of "F."

"It is unacceptable that our nation is failing so many preterm babies," said Jennifer L. Howse, PhD, president of the March of Dimes. "We are determined to find and implement solutions to prevent preterm birth, based on research, best clinical practices, and improved education for moms."

In addition to providing state rankings, the March of Dimes Premature Birth Report Card analyzes contributing factors and prevention opportunities, including rates of late preterm birth, smoking, and uninsured women of child-bearing age. In Alabama, the rate of late preterm births is 11.5%; the rate of women smoking is 23.2%, and the rate of uninsured women is 19.7%.

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"The Report Card illustrates the importance of ensuring every pregnant woman in Alabama has access to health coverage, and it further stresses the value of smoking prevention and cessation," said Gayle Whatley, RNP, MSN March of Dimes Program Services Chair. "These issues will continue to be March of Dimes advocacy priorities."

The Report Card also calls for:

- * Expanded federal support for prematurity-related research to uncover the causes of premature birth and lead not only to strategies for prevention, but also improved care and outcomes for preterm infants.
- * Hospital leaders to voluntarily review all Cesarean-section births and inductions of labor that occur before 39 weeks gestation, in an effort to reverse America's rising preterm birth rate. The review should ensure that all c-sections and inductions meet established professional guidelines.
- * Policymakers to improve access to health coverage for women of childbearing age and to support smoking cessation programs as part of maternity care.
- * Businesses to create workplaces that support maternal and infant health, such as providing private areas to pump breast milk, access to flextime, and information about how to have a healthy pregnancy and childbirth.

November 12th marks the nation's 6th Annual Prematurity Awareness Day, a time when the March of Dimes mobilizes volunteers and parents to draw attention to premature birth (birth before 37 weeks gestation), which affects more than 530,000 babies each year in the United States. Premature birth is the leading cause of newborn death and a major cause of lifelong disability.

In this election year, the March of Dimes invites all Americans to help send a message to our new President and to federal and state lawmakers by signing the 2008 Petition for Premies at marchofdimes.com/petition.

The purpose of the Petition and the Report Card is to raise public awareness of the growing crisis of preterm birth so elected and appointed officials will commit more resources to address this problem and policymakers will support development of strategies that benefit mothers and babies.

The Report Card also is supported by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Association of Women's Health Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses, the National Business Group on Health, the American Benefits Council and dozens of other businesses and maternal and infant health organizations.

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In Alabama the Report Card is supported by: The Alabama Department of Public Health, The Jefferson County Health Department, The Association of Women's Health Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses, and the Alabama Academy of Pediatrics.

"From a public health perspective, improving maternal-infant outcomes is one of the most cost-effective preventive practices we know," said Tom Miller, MD, Associate State Health Officer, Alabama Department of Public Health.

The March of Dimes says that in 2009, Report Card grades will reflect state actions taken that have the potential to reduce preterm birth rates in future years.

Preterm birth is the leading cause of death in the first month of life in the United States. The preterm birth rate has increased more than 20 percent since 1990 and costs the nation more than \$26 billion a year, according to the Institute of Medicine report issued in July 2006.

Babies who survive a premature birth face the risk of serious life-long health problems including learning disabilities, cerebral palsy <http://www.marchofdimes.com/professionals/14332_1208.asp> , blindness, hearing loss <http://www.marchofdimes.com/professionals/14332_1232.asp> , and other chronic conditions including asthma. Even infants born just a few weeks too soon have a greater risk of breathing problems, feeding difficulties, temperature instability (hypothermia), jaundice and delayed brain development.

The March of Dimes is the leading nonprofit organization for pregnancy and baby health. Its mission is 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.

For a community specific response to the report card contact:

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