1. What is World Prematurity Day?

World Prematurity Day on November 17, 2013, is a key moment to generate global attention for cost-effective solutions for prevention and care, to highlight ongoing research needs, and to support families who have experienced a preterm birth.

This year, World Prematurity Day will also highlight the important work of the Every Newborn effort, which seeks to improve newborn health and to reduce maternal and child mortality by uniting the work of all actors, including parent and community groups. The Every Newborn action plan will be launched in May 2014 by a wide group of stakeholders convened by WHO and UNICEF. Learn more at www.everynewborn.org

Preterm birth is a global problem affecting families in across the world. More than 60% of preterm births occur in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. However, the problem of preterm births is universal, with both the United States and Brazil ranking among the top 10 countries with the highest number of preterm births in the world. Everyone has a role to play in preventing and caring for preterm birth and promoting newborn health.

For more information visit: www.facebook.com/worldprematurityday and http://www.everynewborn.org/about/

2. Main messages to promote for World Prematurity Day

Key facts

On a global basis, preterm birth is the leading cause of newborn mortality and the second-leading cause of all deaths of children under age five, after pneumonia.

- Preterm birth accounts for more than 1 million deaths each year. More than 75% of those lives could be saved without access to high technology care.
- Preterm birth rates are increasing in almost all countries with reliable data.
More than 75 percent of preterm babies could be saved without high technology care

- Two priority low-cost effective interventions save many lives, such as steroid injections and Kangaroo Mother Care, which if scaled up to universal coverage could save 430,000 and 450,000 premature lives respectively. Both are not widely used in developing countries despite proven effectiveness.
- Babies who have difficulty breathing need immediate attention and resuscitation, if required. Rapid recognition and treatment of infections with antibiotics is critical. Training of frontline staff to deliver quality interventions is essential.
- Equity matters. Universal access to lifesaving drugs and care can protect the most vulnerable.

Prevention of preterm birth must be accelerated

- Family planning, and increased empowerment of women, especially adolescents, plus improved quality of care before, between and during pregnancy can help to reduce preterm birth rates.
- We need to know more on how to prevent preterm births and strategic investments in innovation and research are required to accelerate progress.

The following World Prematurity Day messages are embargoed until 00.01 hrs. GMT, Friday 15 November.

New research findings 2013

Premature birth is a major problem around the world, with 15.1 million babies affected each year. The chance of death, disability or survival depends on the care where s/he is born.

Boys are more likely to be born preterm, and at higher risk for complications and death

- Boys are 14% more likely to be born preterm
- At any specified gestational age, boys are more likely to have complications such as breathing difficulties to die or be disabled.
- In term babies, boys are at greater risk of sepsis (infection), birth complications and severe jaundice.
- Over the first year, in cultures where baby girls receive less care than boys, including nutrition, and being taken for treatment for illness, then the risk of death for girls increases to above that for boys.

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1 This data draws on a six-paper supplement in Nature's Pediatric Research called “Beyond Newborn Survival”, to be published on 15 November 2013. The series will contain the first systematic estimates of neonatal conditions and the risks of death and disability around the world. It has been compiled from the work of 47 researchers from 35 institutions around the world, over the past four years, led by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

- In the Global Burden of Disease (2012), almost 10% of all conditions around the world are related to newborn conditions. Whilst infections and other burdens are reducing, newborn conditions are not. This has huge economic as well as social implications.
- Four conditions account for the most deaths and disability, with specific data are given by region for: (1) preterm birth, with separate estimates for Retinopathy of prematurity; (2) Effects of birth complications (“birth asphyxia”), such as obstructed labor; (3) neonatal infections (sepsis and meningitis); and (4) neonatal jaundice.
- In middle income countries where neonatal intensive care is being scaled up, much more attention to quality of care and follow up and data are urgently needed. Specific follow up for preterm babies, including eye checks, are crucial to prevent or reduce visual loss and support families with disabled children.
- In all countries, including high income countries, there is a lack of consistent data about coverage of care given to women in labor and to newborns.
Newborns are vulnerable and preterm babies are the most vulnerable—at risk of death and disability within minutes of birth.

- In upper income countries, more than 80% of babies born under 37 weeks survive and thrive. Risk of death and disability greatest for those born at less than 28 weeks. Even babies born just a few early are more likely to be re-hospitalized and have learning and behavioral challenges.
- In middle income countries, great progress has been made in reducing deaths. But, the risk of disability for babies born at 28-32 weeks is double that of those born in high-income countries (HIC). More progress can be made by learning from experiences in HIC scale up.
- In low income countries, preterm babies are >10x likely to die than those in HIC. Without basic care, few survive with severe disabilities. Death is 2x likely than disability.
- Preterm babies are also vulnerable to eye complications. Of the 185,000 newborns affected by retinopathy of prematurity, about 20,000 suffered moderate to severe disabilities, including blindness. There is a risk of repeating the epidemic of blindness in preterm survivors seen in the US and Europe in the 1970s. We can prevent this with better quality of care and also attention to follow up care.

Most newborn deaths and many disabilities could be avoided with lessons learned from the past, as well as new innovations

- In HIC, neonatal care is changing; becoming less intensive and more gentle to babies and families.
- In low- and middle-income countries, feasible and cost-effective interventions can be scaled up to improve outcomes for preterm infants.
- Quality of care and competent health care providers, particularly skilled birth attendants, are essential requirements for providing care for both mother and baby. Many complications can be prevented by focusing on care during pregnancy, labour, birth and days after birth - a critical time to save lives of women, newborns, & prevent stillbirths. Essential newborn care including warmth, hygiene and feeding is important for all babies but especially for those born premature.
- High impact solutions include:
  - Antenatal corticosteroids and better care of women in preterm labor.
  - Kangaroo Mother Care, keeping babies skin to skin with extra support for feeding and care for complications.
  - Resuscitation, for babies who cannot breathe at birth.
  - Treatment of babies with infections through injectable antibiotics.

As treatment and care is expanded to reach every newborn, research can bring new answers to prevent preterm birth in the future.

- Although there are many known risk factors for preterm birth, we still do not fully understand why preterm birth happens. We need more research to better understand the causes of prematurity, and to develop interventions that can prevent preterm birth.
- We also need more research to improve existing interventions and how they are used.
- We need better data on an urgent basis to count every birth, to follow up every newborn and to track care.
**Every Newborn messages**

**Newborns account for a rising share of child deaths in the world — now nearly half**

- Globally, nearly 3 million babies die in the first month of life and 2.6 million babies are stillborn
- Newborn deaths now account for nearly half (44%) of all deaths among children under the age of five.
- Progress in reducing newborn mortality has been much slower compared with reductions of mortality among older children (i.e., those who are 1-59 months of age) — about 2% per year compared with 3.5% per year.
- Four out of five newborn deaths result from three preventable and treatable conditions: complications from prematurity, during childbirth and newborn infections

**Quality care in the 24 hours preceding and following childbirth is most important**

- Hospital and home postnatal care visits in the first week of life support families to implement good care practices and can identify newborn illness
- Community health workers can conduct home postnatal visits
- Improvements in family planning, avoiding unwanted pregnancy particularly among adolescent girls, maternal nutrition and quality antenatal care all save lives.

**Progress is possible, even in low-resource settings**

- In the past decade, 77 countries reduced their newborn mortality rate by over 25%, including 12 low income countries.

**Everyone has a role to play**

- Working together, governments, international organisations, health professionals, NGOs, academia, donors and foundations and private business can achieve rapid progress in addressing preterm birth and newborn survival.

### 3. Resources

**New scientific papers for World Prematurity Day 2013**

- The *Beyond Newborn Survival* series (see “New research findings 2013”, under embargo until 15 November, on pg 2) will be published in *Pediatric Research*, part of the *Nature* scientific publishing group. This series includes six research articles presenting the first systematic estimates of impairment after neonatal morbidity, bringing together the work of almost 50 authors representing 35 institutions from 12 countries, based on more than a thousand different data inputs. The authors summarize global estimates of the incidence of impairments in the year

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*For more information: www.everynewborn.org*
2010 as a result of four major neonatal conditions: preterm birth (including separate estimates of visual impairment due to retinopathy of prematurity), intrapartum-associated neonatal encephalopathy (sometimes referred to as “birth asphyxia”), severe neonatal infections and hyperbilirubinemia (seen clinically as jaundice). *Release: This series will feature free online access from 15 November.*


**Press materials**

The World Prematurity Day 2013 global press release will highlight key findings from the *Beyond Newborn Survival* series (embargoed until 0:01 GMT 15 Nov 2013) and will recap key facts on preterm birth based on the 2012 *Born Too Soon* report and the forthcoming *Reproductive Health* series of papers (embargoed until 15 November 2013). Partners are encouraged to adapt, co-brand and translate this press release template for local media outreach. Note: global media outreach (news wires and global media brands) will be centralized through WPD’s PR agency, Hoffman & Hoffman. Embargoed release available from 11 November. Contact: Marshall Hoffman, President, Hoffman & Hoffman Public Relations Worldwide, [marshall@hoffmanpr.com](mailto:marshall@hoffmanpr.com)

A press kit summarizing all available print, TV and online products (including the PSAs currently running on CNN with Celine Dion and Thalia) is here: [https://www.facebook.com/WorldPrematurityDay/app_537597039652678](https://www.facebook.com/WorldPrematurityDay/app_537597039652678)

**Fact sheets, PPTs, infographics, and customizable templates (posters, petitions, banners, badges)**

PowerPoint presentations, country fact sheets and a full report on the activities of World Prematurity Day 2012 are available here:

[http://www.pretermbirthreport.org](http://www.pretermbirthreport.org)

Login: borntoosoon
Password: preterm
A full toolkit of facts and resources about the *Every Newborn* initiative is here:


**Social media**

- The World Prematurity Day Facebook page is designed to collect and share stories, spread messages about World Prematurity Day and preterm birth. This site includes an interactive map for sharing parent stories from around the world: [www.facebook.com/worldprematurityday](http://www.facebook.com/worldprematurityday).
- The World Prematurity Day 24-hour Global Relay Twitter chat will kick off on 15 November using the #worldprematurityday hashtag. To take part, please contact Kieran O’Dowd, Marketing Manager, March of Dimes at [KODowd@marchofdimes.com](mailto:KODowd@marchofdimes.com)

**Country and global events**

In 2012, more than 50 countries marked World Prematurity with a range of national and local events, including public art installations, Guinness World of Record events, parliamentary hearings, and health professional meetings. A summary of all of events in 2012 is available on the sharepoint link.
4. Ideas for Action

All partners – government, civil society, researchers, private business, UN agencies, health professional groups, parents, donors and foundations – are encouraged to organize events and activities to mark World Prematurity Day 2013, such as:

- Lighting public buildings in purple to symbolize World Prematurity Day
- Organizing press conferences, press releases and discussion items on national TV, newspaper and radio, and advertisements in newspapers and traditional media,
- Organizing and participating in social media campaigns, including Twitter and Facebook
- Hosting public talks, exhibitions of preemie “sock-lines” in market squares, staging a purple balloon or butterfly release, holding art contests for premature children, hosting information sessions led by parents of preterm children, mounting posters and leading public petitions (see templates on World Prematurity Day 2013 SharePoint site).

Please forward details of planned activities to Mary Kinney of Save the Children at mkinney@savechildren.org

Parent advocacy groups and NGOs

- Organize events that will generate media interest, such as massive gatherings of people born prematurity, leading public preterm sock or hat-knitting parties, petitions for political action
- Coordinating activities at hospitals – information sessions, purple week, posters, party for pre-terms, linking with other awareness campaigns happening such as breastfeeding campaigns, etc.
- Month long activities, media tour, social media outreach for the month of November, communicating with health professional groups for messaging and meeting associations in Parliament, signed petitions to government
- Organizing local media support for pro bono distribution of videos such as ‘A little, but important, issue’ (see World Prematurity Day SharePoint site for links)
- Mounting a photo exhibition and gathering of photo subjects (see World Prematurity Day SharePoint site for access to rights-free photos)
- Holding public concerts
- Organizing local celebrity statements to be released to the media in support of WPD
- Information sessions at health centres or hospitals by parents of preterm children

Health professionals, associations and academic and research training institutes

- Organize workshops and seminars to discuss key issues preventing and caring for preterm birth
- Collaborate with government officials and/or MPs to organize professional events and hearings on preterm birth and newborn survival
- Draft statement of action and support and distribute to all national societies and alliances
- Hospitals and health facilities: Consider organizing a “Week of Purple”, holding education and information sessions, organizing celebration events for preterm infants

Governments
• Consider making or updating a commitment of action on preterm birth and newborn survival through the Every Woman Every Child platform led by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon: http://www.everywomaneverychild.org/commitments
• Find out more about the Every Newborn effort and global action plan: www.everynewborn.org
• Host workshops and events to discuss preterm birth and newborn health together with all partners, including UN, donors, health professional associations and civil society.

**UN:**

• Organize local events, promote media attention and drive social media efforts to recognize World Prematurity Day.