

WHAT IS “TERM”?

A term is a certain period of time. For example, a U.S. president has a term of four years. When you are expecting a baby, a healthy “term” for your pregnancy is about 40 weeks. Your due date is set for 40 weeks from your last menstrual period. This is the time it takes for a baby to fully grow and be ready to be born. A baby born at about 40 weeks of pregnancy is called a full-term baby.

WHAT IS PRETERM? IS IT THE SAME AS PREMATURE?

Preterm and premature both mean that a baby is born too early, before 37 weeks of pregnancy. A preterm or premature baby has not had time to fully grow.

WHY IS PRETERM BIRTH A PROBLEM?

Preterm birth is the number one cause of newborn death in the United States. Preterm babies are more likely than full-term babies to die or have health problems. Today, special medical care can help many preterm babies live. But, they are still more likely than full-term babies to have problems at birth and later in life. The earlier babies are born, the more likely they are to have serious problems.

WHO IS LIKELY TO HAVE A PRETERM BABY?

No one knows for sure what causes a woman to have a preterm baby. It can happen to any woman, without any warning signs. But there are some things, called risk factors, that make a woman more likely to have a baby too early. Risk factors for preterm birth include:

- Having already had a preterm baby
- Having preterm birth run in the family
- Being pregnant with twins, triplets or more

These health problems can also be risk factors:

- Problems with your uterus (the womb where your baby grows) or cervix (the bottom of the uterus that opens up to let the baby out)
- Infections, like a vaginal infection, kidney infection, or sexually transmitted disease (STD)
- Diabetes, which is too much sugar in your blood
- High blood pressure
- Problems with your blood clotting
- Bleeding from the vagina
- Certain health problems in the baby

- Being overweight or not weighing enough
- Not enough time between pregnancies (Your body needs 18 to 24 months between babies)

Even things happening in your life can be risk factors. These include:

- Not getting enough medical care while you are pregnant
- Smoking, drinking alcohol, or using illegal drugs
- Violence in your home
- Not enough support from family and friends
- A lot of stress in your life

IS PRETERM BIRTH A PROBLEM IN KENTUCKY?

Yes. In Kentucky, 1 in every 7 babies is born too early. This is more than many other states. These babies are more likely than full-term babies to die or have health problems. They also have higher costs in the hospital. In Kentucky, the hospital bills for preterm babies added up to \$204 million in 2005. Preterm babies can have extra costs later in life, too.

WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT THE PROBLEM OF PRETERM BIRTH?

Here are some things you can do to help you have a full-term baby:

- Get healthy before pregnancy.
- Don't smoke, drink alcohol or take illegal drugs.
- Don't plan to induce labor before 39 weeks unless your provider says you should for medical reasons. Inducing labor means your provider gives you medicine to start your labor.
- Don't plan to have a cesarean section (c-section) before 39 weeks unless your provider says you should for medical reasons. A c-section is when a baby is born through a cut that the doctor makes in the mother's belly and uterus.
- Get medical treatment as soon as possible for any infections.
- Don't get pregnant too soon after having a baby. Wait at least 12 months.
- Reduce the stress in your life. Ask family and friends to help out around the house. Get help if your partner is abusive.