

## WHAT IS A C-SECTION?

A cesarean delivery (also called c-section) is when a baby is born through a cut that the doctor makes in the mother's belly and uterus. Lately, cesarean sections have become more common. This is true even for full-term, healthy pregnancies. In the United States in 2005, doctors performed almost 1.2 million cesarean sections. This is 29.1% of all births that year, or about 1 in 3 babies.

## IS THERE A CONNECTION BETWEEN C-SECTIONS AND PRETERM BIRTH?

In the United States in 2005, more than half a million babies were born preterm. Preterm birth is birth that happens before 37 weeks of pregnancy. This is too early. Preterm birth is the number one cause of newborn death in the United States. Preterm babies are more likely than full-term babies to have problems at birth and later in life. A full-term baby is born at about 40 weeks.

In Kentucky, nearly 1 in every 6 babies is preterm. Almost half of them are born by c-section. Some experts believe that the high number of c-sections may be connected to the high number of preterm births.

A woman should not have a c-section until at least 39 weeks of pregnancy unless it is for medical reasons. This is so babies have all the time they need to grow. If a c-section is scheduled for earlier than 39 weeks, the provider should test to see if the baby's lungs are fully developed.

## ARE THERE PROBLEMS WITH C-SECTIONS?

The natural way for a baby to be born is through the mother's vagina. A woman should have a c-section only if her health or her baby's health is in danger. She should not have a c-section because she can schedule it at a convenient time or for other non-medical reasons. Here are some problems that can be caused by a c-section:

- A c-section is major surgery that can cause problems for mother and baby. Problems for the mother include infection, increased bleeding, injuries to the bowel or bladder, blood clots, problems from anesthesia and even death. Problems for the baby include preterm birth if the c-section is too early, breathing problems and a greater chance that the baby will need to be resuscitated at birth.
- A c-section is more painful than a vaginal birth. It takes longer to recover from a c-section than from a vaginal birth.
- A c-section is more expensive than a vaginal birth.
- Once you have a c-section, you are more likely to have a c-section in future pregnancies. The chance for having problems increases each time you have a cesarean delivery. These problems include stillbirth (when a baby dies in the

womb), preterm birth and problems with the placenta. Your baby may also grow more slowly than other babies born vaginally.

- A growing number of babies are born late preterm. A late preterm baby is one born between 34 and 36 weeks of pregnancy. c-sections may be part of the increase in late preterm births. Late preterm babies may seem healthy, but they are more likely than full-term babies to have medical problems. Late preterm babies may have problems breathing, feeding and keeping warm. Their brains also haven't had time to fully grow.

### **WHAT ARE THE MEDICAL REASONS FOR A C-SECTION?**

C-sections can save lives when they are done for medical reasons. Medical reasons include:

- The baby is not head-down at the time of birth. This is called being in a breech position.
- The baby is having medical problems.
- There are problems with the placenta. The placenta grows in the mother's uterus and supplies the baby with food and oxygen.
- The mother has pregnancy-induced hypertension (PIH). PIH is high blood pressure during pregnancy.
- The mother has a breakout around her vagina from the herpes virus. This infection can hurt the baby during vaginal delivery.
- Labor is not progressing.

If your provider suggests you have a c-section, make sure you understand the medical reasons why. Sometimes women may want to schedule a c-section for non-medical reasons like convenience, tax breaks, vacation plans or family schedules. A woman should never pressure her provider to help her have her baby earlier than about 40 weeks (full-term). The last few weeks of pregnancy can be uncomfortable for the mother. But staying pregnant until the baby is full-term is best, unless there are medical reasons that make it unsafe for the mother or baby.