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For Your Information

Prematurity awareness

The preterm birth rate in the United States dropped for the sixth consecutive year in 2012 to 11.5%, a 15-year low. The change, however, wasn't enough to earn the nation a better grade on the March of Dimes Premature Birth Report Card. The report card, www.marchofdimes.com/reportcard, was issued Nov. 1 to kick off the annual Prematurity Awareness Day, Nov. 17.

The U.S. preterm birth rate is higher than any developed country. A preterm birth (before 37 weeks of pregnancy) costs about 12 times more than a healthy birth, according to the March of Dimes. It is the leading cause of newborn death. Babies who survive an early birth often face serious and sometimes lifelong health problems, such as breathing problems, jaundice, developmental delays, vision loss and cerebral palsy. Babies born just a few weeks too soon have higher rates of death and disability than full-term babies. Even infants born at 37-38 weeks' gestation have an increased risk for health problems compared to infants born at 39 weeks.

Pediatricians can join the Academy in supporting the Prematurity Campaign by sharing information via social media at www.Facebook.com/marchofdimes.

