

November 17, 2010

## **STATE IMPROVES ITS GRADE ON MARCH OF DIMES 2010 PRETERM BIRTH REPORT CARD**

Dec. 2 March of Dimes Prematurity Summit to focus on smoking cessation for pregnant women.

Rhode Island is one of eight states to receive an improved grade on the third annual March of Dimes Premature Birth Report Card – earning a C. That’s because Rhode Island’s preterm birth rate, birth before 37 week gestation, dropped to 11.2 percent in 2008, compared to 12 percent in the prior year. The March of Dimes released its 2010 report card today, November 17, the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Prematurity Awareness Day®, when the nation is asked to focus attention on the serious problem of premature birth.

“We hope that this is just the beginning of trend, and we’re proud to see that the March of Dimes investment in Rhode Island is reaping benefits for moms and babies,” said Maureen Phipps, MD, March of Dimes Rhode Island Board member and chair of the Rhode Island Prematurity Task Force. Dr. Phipps is an obstetrician and gynecologist at Women & Infants Hospital and vice chair for research in the Department of OB/GYN at the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University Hospital. She is director of the Brown University/Women & Infants National Center of Excellence in Women’s Health.

In Rhode Island, 11.2 percent of babies were born too soon, before their lungs, brains or other organs were fully developed. Factors that contribute to preterm birth also improved in Rhode Island. It earned a star for:

- Reducing the percentage of women of childbearing age who smoke to 17.1 percent in 2008, compared to 20.3 percent for the prior year
- Lowering the late preterm birth rate to 7.8 percent in 2008, compared to 8.1 percent for the prior year.

Following three decades of increases, in 2008 the nation achieved the first two-year decline in the preterm birth rate, when the preliminary preterm birth rate dropped to 12.3 percent. However, the March of Dimes says the rate is still too far from the Healthy People 2010 goal of 7.6 percent and gave the nation a “D”. More than half a million babies still are born preterm each year, a serious health problem that costs the United States more than \$26 billion annually, according to the Institute of Medicine.

Prematurity is the leading cause of newborn death, and babies who survive often face lifetime health challenges, including learning disabilities, cerebral palsy and intellectual disabilities. Even infants born just a

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Preterm Birth Report Card

few weeks early have higher rates of hospitalization and illness than full-term infants. The last few weeks of pregnancy are critical to a baby's health because many important organs, including the brain and lungs, are not completely developed until then.

There are known strategies that can lower the risk of an early birth, such as smoking cessation, preconception care, early prenatal care, progesterone treatments for women with a history of preterm birth, avoiding multiples from fertility treatments and avoiding unnecessary c-sections and inductions before 39 weeks.

**March of Dimes will focus on “Tobacco Control Interventions for Pregnant Women” at the March of Dimes Prematurity Summit on Dec. 2, from 7 am to 9:15 am, at Women & Infants’ Hospital.** There is no charge; continuing education credits will be provided. The grand rounds keynote speaker will be Sharon Phelan, MD, vice chair of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of New Mexico. Phelan’s talk will be followed by a presentation on QuitWorks-RI, a free smoking cessation program, provided by Terri Mrozak, RN, from Quality Partners of Rhode Island. The annual report of the Rhode Island Prematurity Task Force will be presented by its chair, Dr. Maureen Phipps, obstetrician and gynecologist at Women & Infants Hospital and vice chair for research in the Department of OB/GYN at the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University Hospital; followed by perspectives from the Director of the Rhode Island Department of Health Dr. David Gifford. For more information and to register by Nov. 22, call the March of Dimes at 401-454-1911, or visit [www.marchofdimes.com/rhodeisland](http://www.marchofdimes.com/rhodeisland).

The March of Dimes recently released a tool kit to help lower the number of medically unnecessary c-sections and inductions done before 39 weeks gestation. It is available from the March of Dimes web site:

[http://www.marchofdimes.com/prematurity/index\\_professionals\\_66663.asp](http://www.marchofdimes.com/prematurity/index_professionals_66663.asp)

The March of Dimes is the leading nonprofit organization for pregnancy and baby health. With chapters nationwide, the March of Dimes works to improve the health of babies by preventing birth defects, premature birth and infant mortality. For the latest resources and information, visit [marchofdimes.com](http://marchofdimes.com) or [nacersano.org](http://nacersano.org). Find us on [Facebook](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#).

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