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The March of Dimes

The March of Dimes is a national voluntary health agency with chapters in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Its mission is to improve the health of babies by preventing birth defects, premature birth and infant mortality. The March of Dimes accomplishes this with its programs of research, community services, education, and advocacy.

The March of Dimes was established in 1938 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to save America's youth from epidemic polio. The organization funded the development of both the Salk and Sabin vaccines, which eradicated polio from the United States and most of the world.

With the defeat of polio, the March of Dimes re-focused on the challenge of saving babies from serious infant health problems. In 2003, the March of Dimes launched a campaign to address the serious and growing problem of premature birth, the leading cause of death in newborns. Babies who survive often face lifelong disabilities such as cerebral palsy, mental retardation, vision and hearing loss.

Over the years, March of Dimes support has led to breakthroughs that have spared many babies from death or disability, including support for:

- Initiation of a regionalized system of hospital neonatal intensive care units (NICUs) to treat sick and premature babies.
- Surfactant therapy to save the lives of premature babies with immature lungs.
- Drug treatments to replace surgery for babies with a common heart defect;
- Treatment to help prevent severe newborn jaundice and resulting brain damage;
- Establishing the effectiveness of AZT treatment to prevent the transmission of the AIDS virus from mothers to their babies;
- Establishing nitric oxide as a treatment for critically ill premature babies with dangerously high blood pressure in their lungs;
- Development of four newborn screening tests to identify treatable conditions that can otherwise result in permanent brain damage or death.

For more information, visit the March of Dimes Web site at marchofdimes.com or its Spanish language Web site at nacersano.org.

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