

FACTSHEET ON PRETERM BIRTH IN NIGERIA

What is preterm birth?

A preterm birth is when a baby is born alive but before 37 weeks of pregnancy are completed.¹ In Nigeria, one in three newborn deaths are due to preterm birth complications (2015 estimate).² Babies born too soon are approximately seven times more likely to die during the first four weeks of their lives than babies born at term.³

In addition, preterm survivors often suffer from lifelong disabilities, such as visual and hearing impairments, chronic lung disease, long term cardiovascular ill-health, learning and behavioural impairments.¹ Prematurity has a far-reaching impact on their development and on their health as children and adults.

Preterm birth is a public health problem in Nigeria

Nigeria ranks third in the world for the number of preterm births (2015 estimate).^{4,a} In 2015, an estimated 855,200 babies were born before 37 weeks of pregnancy were completed.⁴ In the same year, an estimated 87,600 children under five years of age died due to preterm birth complications in Nigeria.⁴ Prematurity is the leading cause of death for babies in the first month of life.²

What can be done in Nigeria?

Many of these deaths could be prevented, through both prevention of preterm birth, and care for the premature baby.

- @ Adolescent pregnancy, older age pregnancy, short time gaps between births, chronic and infectious diseases, and unhealthy pre-pregnancy weight increase the risk of preterm birth¹
- @ Family planning strategies, including birth spacing and adolescent-friendly services, can reduce the risk of preterm birth¹
- @ Encourage early initiation and exclusive breastfeeding¹
- @ Quality antenatal and postnatal care, along with skilled care at delivery, can help to reduce deaths due to preterm birth. Investing in trained and equipped health care workers is key, with a focus on the 48 hours surrounding birth¹
- @ In August 2015, the World Health Organization (WHO) published new recommendations to improve the survival and health of babies born too soon⁵. Decision-makers should review and revise national clinical guidelines and essential medicines lists; promote the new recommendations widely; strengthen the skills of health workers to deliver the interventions; support health workers to accurately assess gestational age; and monitor adherence to the guidelines.⁵

In 2014 Nigeria committed to the Every Newborn Action Plan⁶ and launched a Call to Action to save newborn lives.⁷ These strategies set out the priority solutions, and call for a united effort to dramatically reduce maternal and newborn deaths, and preventable stillbirths.

We must prioritise the evidence-based, cost-effective and feasible solutions in all health facilities that provide pregnancy and delivery services, as well as ensure better data collection on pregnancy outcomes to enable responsive action where it is most needed.

**NOW IS THE TIME TO SCALE UP QUALITY CARE TO ALL WOMEN AND NEWBORNS FOR THEM TO
SURVIVE, THRIVE AND TRANSFORM SOCIETY!**





PREMATURITY IN NIGERIA

Number of newborn deaths in the first month of life (2015)⁸	240,100
Mortality rate in the first month of life per 1000 babies born alive (2015) ⁸	34/1000
Number of babies born preterm (2015)⁴	855,200
Country rank for number of babies born preterm (2015) ⁴	3
Number of under-five deaths due to preterm birth complications (2015)⁴	87,600
Demand for family planning (any method) satisfied (2013)⁹	49%
Antenatal care of four or more visits (2013) ⁹	51%
Skilled attendant at delivery (2013)⁹	38%
Mothers who received postnatal care within two days of birth (2013) ⁹	40%
Women initiating breastfeeding within 1 hour of birth (2013)⁹	33%
Proportion of babies 0-5 months who are exclusively breastfed (2013) ⁹	17%

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Notes:

- a. Nigeria ranks 3rd (of 162 countries) globally for highest under-five deaths due to direct preterm birth complications (0-59 months) for 2015.

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