

Strong Start Newsletter Drop-in

Below is suggested language you or your organization can use to encourage your partners to get involved by raising awareness and sharing resources that help expectant mothers get safe, evidence-based care, and improve their newborn's chances for good physical and developmental health.

Subject Line: Give babies a “Strong Start” on life

Did you know that just a couple more weeks of development in the mother's womb can make a huge difference in lifetime health for a newborn?

To give babies a better chance to fully develop, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has partnered with the March of Dimes (MOD), the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) and others to launch the “Strong Start” initiative.

“Strong Start” has 2 separate, but related programs:

1. Building on the work of the Partnership for Patients, this initiative will test ways to disseminate best practices and support providers in reducing early elective deliveries. CMS will also collaborate with advocacy and professional organizations to amplify current and develop public awareness efforts.
2. A CMS funding opportunity for providers, states and other applicants to test whether enhanced prenatal care can help reduce pre-term births in women covered by Medicaid.

Why do babies need a “Strong Start”?

Although health care professionals in the U.S. commonly consider a pregnancy of 37 weeks as “full term” for a baby's growth, research shows:

- Between 37 and 39 weeks of pregnancy babies experience significant and important brain and lung development. During the last 6 weeks of pregnancy, for example, the size of a baby's brain almost doubles.
- Babies born before 39 weeks have a significantly higher risk of complications at birth as well as higher risk of developmental delays that may affect their quality of life as adults.

It's difficult to be sure a baby has even reached 37 weeks of development—gestational dating is often inexact and ultra-sound exams can be off by as much as 2 weeks.

Each year, more than half a million babies in the United States are born preterm, a number that's grown by 36 percent over the last 20 years. It's a growing public health problem with significant consequences for families. And it costs our society an estimated \$26 billion each year.

In addition, for decades, public health officials and private organizations such as MOD and ACOG have campaigned against elective deliveries, but this practice may still account for 10-15 percent of all deliveries in the U.S. The most frequently cited reasons for these deliveries are concerns from health providers that the mother is overdue, convenience for the mother and the provider, and the size of the baby.

Get Involved

Let's get mothers and newborns off to a Strong Start.

Visit: <http://www.cms.gov/Outreach-and-Education/Outreach/Partnerships/index.html> to learn more about what you can do to cut the rate of early elective deliveries and preterm births and to access additional resources in the online e-toolkit.

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