Prematurity Causes One in Three Infant Deaths, Study Concludes

One in three infant deaths in the United States is the direct result of prematurity, double the proportion previously believed, federal researchers report in the journal *Pediatrics*.

Earlier data obtained solely from death certificates had indicated that birth defects were the major cause of death among children in their first year.

However, by linking death certificates with birth certificates of nearly 30,000 babies who died in 2002, researchers documented that birth before 37 weeks of gestation plays the dominant role. A full-term baby is born at 38 to 42 weeks.

The study, led by Dr. William M. Callaghan of the Division of Reproductive Health at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, concluded that almost 10,000 deaths studied were a direct result of preterm birth.

In the U.S., one in eight infants born in 2004 (most recent figures) was premature, a 30 percent increase over the rate in 1980. The reason for the increase is unknown.

In Los Angeles County, birthplace of one in 27 babies born in the U.S., more than 800 babies die each year and low birth weight/preterm births is a leading cause of these deaths.

"Infant deaths can be prevented by enhancing care and support to women and their families before, during, and between pregnancies," said Dr. Carolina Reyes, executive director of LA Best Babies Network. The network, created and funded by First 5 LA's $28 million Healthy Births Initiative, seeks to provide public education and support to caregivers and women at risk for premature births and low birth weight babies.

For information, visit [www.labestbabies.org](http://www.labestbabies.org).
First 5 LA Fellows to Develop Innovative Projects in Early Learning and Health

Three UCLA doctoral students have been named First 5 LA Fellows in a new fellowship program designed to cultivate leaders in the field of early health and education.

**Jeong-Kyun Choi** is a second-year doctoral student in social welfare. Born in Korea, he earned his BA in social work and MA in social welfare from Yonsei University in Seoul. Poverty and inequality caused by the Korean economic crisis in the late 1990s sparked his interest in public policy for poor families and disadvantaged children.

His First 5 LA project will be to create a comprehensive plan for funding approaches and innovative mechanisms for creating sustainable and systematic community change. The proposed plan will inform First 5 LA’s next strategic plan and long-term funding strategies.

**Christine Ong** is a doctoral student in education and information studies. Her First 5 LA research will examine the efficacy of early childhood interventions. Scheduled to complete her dissertation this fall, Ong previously worked as a kindergarten teacher and museum educator in Chicago. She earned a BA in international studies from Miami University in Ohio and an MA from UCLA in psychological studies in education.

**Susana Halpine** is a second year doctoral student in education. She grew up in South America, graduated from Worcester State College in Massachusetts and, while working under Nobel laureate Eric Kandel at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute at Columbia University, pursued an MS in human nutrition. She worked in art conservation at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., and developed multimedia educational technology in Los Angeles.

Her work as director of the STArt! Teaching Science Through Art program in the Los Angeles Unified School District led her to do graduate research in early science education. Her First 5 LA project will be to develop a science-based nutrition curriculum for parents of young children.

The First 5 LA Fellows will be working closely with First 5 LA staff, strategic partners, and grantees in the coming months.
EVIE'S DESK

Keeping our Children Safe Is Everyone’s Responsibility

In the wake of three deadly school shootings in a week in this country, parents, caregivers, and educators of children must become more aware of suspicious behavior and more vigilant against the “unthinkable.” Many schools and child care centers increased security measures after the 1999 Columbine High School shootings, but even with metal detectors and security plans, it’s unrealistic to believe we can make our children safe at all times from any eventuality.

However, there are some proactive steps we can take to increase child safety in situations that may be less unpredictable than a random shooting.

Here are some safety tips for parents and caregivers of young children to consider:

- Don’t let your child wear clothing with his or her name on it. A child will tend to pay attention to anyone calling him or her by name.
- Never leave a child unattended while shopping or running errands, or alone in a motor vehicle.
- Make sure your child learns his or her address and phone number at an early age. A second phone number of a friend or relative is also helpful.
- Teach your child to call 911 in an emergency.
- Keep a written record of all birthmarks, scars and identifying features, like moles or freckles.
- Keep a growth chart of your child so you know his or her weight and height.
- Make sure your child knows to scream and run if approached in an alarming way by anyone.

Several New Laws Affecting Children and Families Signed by California Governor

Several key bills affecting children and families have recently been approved by the California Legislature and signed into law by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Among these are:

- SB 437 (Escutia)-Allows approximately 94,000 more children to enroll in or maintain health insurance and streamlines enrollment and renewal for Healthy Families and Medi-Cal, reducing lapses in coverage. This bill was supported by First 5 LA.
- AB 172 (Chan) - Appropriates approximately $55 million from the 2005-06 Budget Act for preschool and family literacy programs.
- AB 633 (Benoit) - Requires every child care facility licensed by the California Department of Social Services to post not only its license, but also documentation regarding investigations, conferences, or intent to revoke the facility's license.
- AB 1282 (Mullin) - Extends the availability of the Employer Child Care Program Credit to taxable years beginning before January 1, 2012.
- AB 2651 (Jones) - Requires every general acute care hospital with licensed perinatal services to provide a hearing screening for every newborn.

CHAMPION PROFILE

Judy Gomez Coordinates WIC Programs For Low-Income Families in Southland

Monday Morning Report features individuals who exemplify First 5 LA’s tagline, “Champions for Our Children.”

Judy Gomez is the special projects coordinator for the PHFE-WIC Program, a non-profit agency that serves more than 315,000 women, infants and children in Los Angeles and Orange Counties.

She has promoted health, fitness and education with low-income families for 30 years, and currently oversees immunization services, a childhood obesity prevention research project, Medi-Cal enrollment, and "Little By Little", an early literacy project funded by First 5 LA.

She is also spearheading the WIC Data Mining Project, a research partnership with First 5 LA, which collects and analyzes data on WIC families to inform policy-making.
Active on numerous state and local committees and coalitions to further the health of families, Gomez serves on the board of the Los Angeles Best Babies Network and Centre Stage, a local non-profit theater group that supports on-stage experience for children. She is a registered dietitian and certified lactation consultant, who earned a BS and MS in public health nutrition from UCLA.

**What is your idea of a perfect world?**
Where everyone respects everyone else.

**What is the greatest challenge faced by children and families of LA County?**
Poverty and stress.

**Which living person do you most admire?**
My mother, who is the strongest woman I know.

**Who was your favorite teacher and why?**
Roger Clemmons, my teaching assistant in a chemistry lab class at UCLA, who instilled in me the love of science.

**What is your motto?**
"Bring it on!"