

PREMATURITY AWARENESS GUIDE:

Tips to Activate Your Village as an Anchor of Support

Preterm labor is labor that begins before a pregnancy reaches 37 weeks. It can take place even if the mother/birthing person is healthy and doing their best to ensure the safe and healthy delivery of their baby. This free, downloadable guide provides some tips, advice, and resources to help pregnant women/birthing persons and their support system know what to look for, help prevent premature births, advocate for healthy births, and be an anchor of support in the event that a premature birth happens.

For a downloadable version of this guide with links to resources, please visit blackinfantsandfamilies.org/preemie.

KNOW THE SIGNS

How do I know if I am experiencing premature labor?

Some signs include:

✓ Early contractions that are regular or frequent

✓ Abdominal cramping

✓ Water breaking

✓ Vaginal spotting, bleeding or change in vaginal discharge

✓ Constant dull pain in the lower back

✓ Pressure in the lower belly area (as if the baby is pushing down)



PREVENTION

What can I do to prevent premature birth?



Ensure that you are having regular prenatal visits with your doctor.



Educate yourself on premature birth with information and support from organizations like:

- [March of Dimes](#)
- [Mighty Little Giants](#)

Review your health history with your doctor and let them know if you have experienced preterm birth with a previous pregnancy or have health conditions like diabetes or high blood pressure.



Minimize stress.

- Take breaks/rest when you need to
- Delegate tasks to your partner and/or Village
- Engage in stress-relieving activities, such as taking a prenatal yoga class from [Luna y Sol Yoga](#)



Get additional birth support from a [doula](#) and/or midwife, and check in with them regularly during pregnancy.



Nurture your body with healthy and nutritious foods, while eliminating harmful substances.

Begin building your village of support through nurturing environments that are parent-centered. Some examples:

- [Parent Coaches](#)
- [Black Infant Health](#)
- [Black Mamas Matter Alliance](#)
- [LACOE Early Head Start](#)
- [Parenting for Liberation](#)
- [M.E.N.T.O.R.S.](#)
- [Fatherhood Groups](#)
- [Home Visiting LA](#)
- [MAMA's Neighborhood Program](#)



Manage any other chronic health conditions that you may have and closely monitor them during pregnancy.



If this is not your first pregnancy, consider spacing out your pregnancies. Pregnancies less than 18 months apart carry an increased risk of premature birth.

ACTIVATE YOUR VILLAGE

Activate your village as an anchor of support.

Your village may include:



Make sure your village is in place early in your pregnancy and delegate the role that each person can play in the event that you need their support and guidance. For example, setting up a food train or folks to help with household chores and errands in the event you have an extended hospital stay or bed rest.

ADVOCACY

Will my doctor listen to me?

Sometimes concerns are overlooked or unspoken until it is too late. Begin advocating for yourself and for the baby now. Having a support system around you (like a doula, home visitor, partner, or trusted family member/friend) who can speak up if something is wrong can be very helpful. Remind your care providers of the elevated risk of preterm birth for



Black women. Your concerns deserve to be heard. If your doctor seems distracted, condescending, or is dismissing your concerns, you have a right to say something about it. Your birthing hospital should give you information on how to file a complaint if you receive disrespectful care. You can ask for this information up front.

Here are more resources to help you advocate for respectful care: [How to Speak Up For Your Health](#) [How to File a Civil Rights Complaint](#)

SUPPORT

How do I make sure that I have the best outcome possible if I have my baby early?

- ✓ Connect with NICU support. The Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) staff is there to help your baby become stronger while you cope with the effects of a preterm delivery. There are many people involved to help you through this time. Get to know them [here](#).
- ✓ Reach out to organizations and resources that provide breast/chestfeeding support like [Cinnamoms](#), which assists Black families.
- ✓ Connect with other families who share your experience through social media, support groups, and sister chats.
- ✓ Prioritize your mental health. This can be a stressful time for you and your family. It's okay to [ask for help](#) if you need it.
- ✓ Know your rights regarding Paid Family Leave for [fathers](#) as well as [mothers/birthing persons](#). These [fact sheets](#) from [LegalAidAtWork.org](#) can provide additional help.
- ✓ See if you qualify for other benefits, including:
 - Earned Income Tax Credit ([EITC](#))
 - Get free tax help through [KYCC](#) or [FreeTaxPrepLA.unitedway.org](#)
 - American Rescue Plan ([ARP](#))
 - Mortgage and prevention benefits
 - Extended unemployment
- ✓ Check with your provider and home visitor regarding possible needed supports to assist your baby with developing or overcoming any physical/health challenges as a result of being born prematurely.

[BlackInfantsAndFamilies.org](#)

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