Preterm labor is regular contractions of the womb causing the cervix (opening of the womb) to thin and open up before 37 weeks of pregnancy. Preterm labor can lead to preterm birth.

Babies born too early have more health problems because they may not be fully grown. These babies may need to stay in the hospital for a long time. Some babies can have very serious health problems that can last a lifetime.

What causes preterm labor and birth?
Sometimes we don’t know what causes preterm labor and birth. Even if you do the right things during pregnancy, you can have preterm labor and birth.

We do know some things make a woman more likely to have preterm labor and birth. These are called risk factors. Having a risk factor doesn’t mean that you’ll have preterm labor or give birth early. But it may add to your chances.

What are the risk factors for preterm labor?
- Past preterm birth
- Having a short cervix length
- Having certain types of surgery on the womb or cervix
- Pregnancy factors such as multiples (twins, triplets), vaginal bleeding, some infections
- Lifestyle factors: underweight before pregnancy, smoking and substance abuse during pregnancy
- Less than 12 months between pregnancies

To learn more about your Health Plan choices please contact Illinois Client Enrollment Services at 1-877-912-8880 or visit www.EnrollHFS.Illinois.gov.
**What are the warning signs of preterm labor?**

Call your medical provider right away if you notice any of these:

- Contractions (your belly tightens like a fist) every 10 minutes or more
- Changes in vaginal discharge (watery, mucus or bloody)
- Increase in amount of vaginal discharge
- Pelvic pressure (feeling that your baby is pushing down)
- Constant low, dull backache
- Belly cramps (that feel like your period) with or without diarrhea
- Bag of water ruptures (a gush or trickle of fluid from the vagina)

**Your medical provider may tell you to:**

- Stop what you are doing. Rest on your left side for one hour
- Drink 2-3 glasses of water or juice (not coffee or soda)
- Go to the clinic or hospital for a health exam

**How is preterm labor diagnosed?**

A pelvic exam is done to see if there are changes in the cervix.

**Is there treatment for preterm labor?**

If you have preterm labor, your medical provider may suggest some medications that may help stop your contractions and prevent health problems for you and your baby. These medications may not stop your preterm labor. But, if you’re having preterm labor, they may help you stay pregnant longer. If the labor cannot be stopped, certain medications can help speed up the growth of the baby’s lungs, brain and other organs.

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**If you have any questions about Preterm (Premature) Labor and Birth, call Enrollee Services. The phone number to call is 1-866-871-2305 or talk to your primary care provider.**

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**REFERENCES**

The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologist  
409 12th Street SW  
Washington, DC 20024-2188  
Mailing Address:  
PO Box 70620  
Washington, DC 20024-9998  
www.acog.org

March of Dimes, Illinois Chapter  
111 W. Jackson, Suite 1650  
Chicago, IL  60604  
Office: (312) 435-4007  
Fax: (312) 435-0988  
www.marchofdimes.org/illinois