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USLCA Recognizes November 17 as World Prematurity Day

RALEIGH, N.C. — The United States Lactation Consultant Association (USLCA) joins the March of Dimes in recognizing November 17 as World Prematurity Day. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 in every 9 babies born in the United States is born too soon. Any birth occurring three or more weeks before the due date is considered a premature birth. There are many potential complications of premature birth, including serious, potentially life threatening infections such as sepsis and necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC), breathing difficulties, digestive issues, and developmental delays. Babies born early are at greater risk of hospital readmission, illness, learning disabilities, and even death than the general population of healthy term infants.

Access to good prenatal care and supporting the health of expectant mothers, both help reduce the risk of preterm birth. And when babies *do* come too soon, providing the best care and nutrition is critical. Human milk is the ideal food for human babies, and is even more important for preemies than for full-term infants.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recognizes that human milk helps to protect preterm infants from sepsis and NEC and enhances babies' development of their own defenses. According to the AAP, preemies who were fed human milk had fewer hospital readmissions as well as better brain and neurological development. The AAP guidelines support mother's milk as the primary diet, which can be fortified with additional nutrients for infants weighing less than 3.3lbs.

The Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine (ABM) also supports the use of mother's milk for preterm infants and emphasizes the need for breastfeeding support, as mothers are often discharged before their milk supply is fully established. The ABM goes on to speak to the importance of mothers and preterm infants having timely access to a trained lactation professional, as they are likely to have more complicated breastfeeding problems.

International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLC) are health care professionals with the education and experience to help mothers of preterm infants establish a milk supply, provide their protective milk for their tiny infants, and help transition to feedings at the breast. Fostering breastfeeding for preterm infants has important health implications for both mother and infant, and promotes attachment during a time of stress and separation. For more information about the IBCLC, or to locate one in your area, visit www.uslca.org.

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