

# **Prematurity Awareness Month**

**November 2008**



## **Planning Guide for Youth Volunteers**

[marchofdimes.com/youth](http://marchofdimes.com/youth)



Dear March of Dimes Volunteers:

Prematurity Awareness Month is November and Prematurity Awareness Day is November 12. The National Youth Council has developed this Planning Guide for Youth Volunteers to provide support and ideas on how youth volunteers can participate in Prematurity Awareness Month 2008. Included are examples of simple and successful youth-led activities that can generate both awareness and financial support on behalf of the March of Dimes mission.

From getting signatures on the Petition for Preemies to decorating your campus in purple to a range of volunteer opportunities with the local NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit) to support our programs, this guide provides just a start to what you can do this November to raise awareness and support the tiniest of babies.

If you have additional questions or would like more information, please contact Allison Hauser by e-mail [ahauser@marchofdimes.com](mailto:ahauser@marchofdimes.com), or contact the National Youth Council listed at [marchofdimes.com/youth](http://marchofdimes.com/youth).

Inside, we have great options to get involved; do them all or do a few, then we look forward to hearing from you about your mission and fundraising Prematurity Awareness Month activities!

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## SPREAD THE WORD

### Getting Connected with Social Media

**Objective:** To raise awareness, gather signatures and funds and for the March of Dimes online

**Overview:** To promote your events and fundraising activities online!

- Checklist:**
- Create an event on Facebook to promote your activity/fundraiser
  - Share the Petition for Premies Badge on your Facebook and MySpace pages, asking people to sign
  - Mention the Petition for Premies in all your blog posts that are appropriate
  - Share the Change for America's Babies Badge on your pages, asking people to donate
  - Add a March of Dimes bumper sticker or flair to your Facebook page, and send one to a friend!
  - Add March of Dimes as your friend on MySpace at [myspace.com/marchofdimesyouth](http://myspace.com/marchofdimesyouth)
  - Join the March of Dimes cause, group and fan page on Facebook – and encourage your friends to do the same to spread the word on premature birth and how we can help give every baby a healthy start.

### Decorate in Purple

**Objective:** To create widespread Prematurity Campaign awareness with a purple glow.

**Overview:** Decorate your school buildings, hallways and/or lobbies in purple

- Checklist:**
- Contact your principal, asking to meet with him or her about decorating in purple during November. Find a template letter at the end of this guide.
  - Talk to your principal, explaining the importance of Prematurity Awareness Month and Day, and let him know that you want your school to raise awareness of this event with bulletin boards, balloons & anything else appropriate!
  - Consider making T-shirts that state “1 in 8” for 1 in 8 babies born premature as conversation pieces to help raise awareness
  - Sell awareness bands on campus; order them online at [marchofdimes.com/youth](http://marchofdimes.com/youth).



## VOLUNTEER LOCALLY

### Volunteer for local Neonatal Intensive Care Units & families

- Join the Prematurity Awareness Day committee.
- Serve as greeters at educational events.
- Do internet research on mission-related topics as needed by chapter program staff.
- Help design and create mission displays and interactive learning activities.
- “Adopt” a local agency or grantee and keep them supplied with March of Dimes literature.
- Help organize a community baby shower to restock incentive items for Stork’s Nests.
- Assist with Scrapbooking Groups and NICU Family Support Parent Hours
- Help in arranging for NICU Family Support events such as Family Reunions, etc.
- Collate Parent Care Kits, information packets, etc.
- Put stickers in the Scholastic books provided to families as part of our Bedside Reading, Sibling and Going Home programs
- Support the NICU Family Support Specialist by creating flyers for upcoming events, making copies, contacting other volunteers, etc.
- Assist with decorating the NICU for the holidays or special events.
- Work with you chapter to tell your personal prematurity or NICU volunteer activity story to the media.

This does not reflect a comprehensive list of opportunities. Feel free to contact your local March of Dimes Chapter. For contact information, please visit [marchofdimes.com/youth](http://marchofdimes.com/youth) and enter your ZIP code in the box at the top.

### Prematurity Awareness Booth at Community Events

**Objective:** To promote awareness of the seriousness of premature birth at community events such as county or health fairs

**Overview:** Organize a booth at a community fair or parade. Prematurity Awareness Month is in November so your local Thanksgiving Day parade would be a great setting! Distribute brochures, display visual aids representing the size of a premature baby, and let people know how they can get involved with the cause.

**Checklist:**

- Make sure your school’s administration approves this project.
- Get materials from your local March of Dimes office.
- Host a booth in a very visible location.
- Be prepared to explain the March of Dimes mission and to answer questions about the Campaign (see enclosed speaking points).



## FUNDRAISERS

### Blue Jeans for Babies

**Objective:** Make wearing your favorite jeans a way to raise money to help all babies get a healthy start in life

**Overview:** Organize a day when everyone makes a contribution and wears blue jeans to raise awareness about the problem of premature birth and to support the March of Dimes. If you can wear blue jeans every day, encourage your teachers or administrators to support the project – and ask that people wear purple tops and blue jeans to add an extra layer.

**Checklist:**

- Make sure your school's administration approves this project.
- Get materials from your local March of Dimes office.
- Be prepared to explain the March of Dimes mission and to answer questions about the Campaign (see enclosed speaking points).
- Promote your event in school media—newsletter, newspaper and radio station; be sure to report afterward how much money was raised.

### Change for America's Babies

**Objective:** To raise funds and awareness for the March of Dimes through educational and coin collection activities.

**Overview:** How can you raise change? Here a few ideas!

- Empty your coin jar, turn out your pockets, look under the sofa cushions and check in your car.
- Pass out coin-collection bags to your friends and family. Urge them to ask *their* friends and family for change.
- Set up a collection box at your school or office so people can donate their change.
- Hold a special coin drive like a Mile of Dimes or a coin weigh-in competition.

**Checklist:** Visit [marchofdimes.com/change](http://marchofdimes.com/change) to register for a badge and download materials including posters, jar covers and certificates.





## DO MORE!

### Two Week Fun Fund Raising Plan

**Objective:** To raise funds and awareness for the March of Dimes through spirit activities.

**Overview:** During 2 weeks in November, encourage everyone at your school to participate in different daily Prematurity Awareness Activities. Find the Plan in the Activities section of [marchofdimes.com/youth](http://marchofdimes.com/youth). If you cannot implement a full 2 week schedule, pull items from the calendar and host a one day, three day, or week event, or whatever is most appropriate for your school.

- Checklist:**
- Make sure your school's administration approves this project.
  - Get materials from your local March of Dimes office or from [marchofdimes.com/youth](http://marchofdimes.com/youth).
  - Award students with the best outfits each day with donated prizes.
  - Recognize all students who participate all 10 days. Ask to set up a table during lunch to have participating students "sign in" for the day.
  - Ask local businesses to donate coupons to the students who participate every day, or the class with the most participation
  - Educate your school: share the Announcement each morning, or at a certain time during the day such as homeroom or the final period of the day

### Teen-2-Teen Health Education

**Objective:** Share the mission with your peers – let them know why the mission is so important now, even before planning a family

**Overview:** Teen-2-Teen videos feature teens speaking candidly about the consequences of smoking, drinking, drugs and how these "risk behaviors" impact their health today as well as babies they may have in the future. In addition, teens speak about the impact and benefits of a healthy lifestyle including good nutrition, regular exercise, adequate sleep, stress management, and positive peer relationships. The materials are intended for use by professionals and/or by teen peer educators.



**Checklist:** The Teen-2-Teen videos can be downloaded from the March of Dimes Team Youth web site [marchofdimesyouth.com/videos](http://marchofdimesyouth.com/videos) - along with a curriculum for teen peer or adult educators. Contact your local March of Dimes office for more support on giving this program.



## PARTNERS

### National Youth Clubs and Organizations Partners

The March of Dimes has national relationships with the following clubs and organizations and you may wish to work with one or more of them in your community to help you put on your Team Youth event:

#### MIDDLE SCHOOL

- ◆ Builder's Club
- ◆ Future Business Leaders of America – Middle Level

#### HIGH SCHOOL

- ◆ America's Promise
- ◆ Family, Career and Community Leaders of America
- ◆ Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA)
- ◆ Key Club International
- ◆ Top Ladies of Distinction, Inc – Top Teens of America

#### COLLEGE

- ◆ Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity
- ◆ Circle K International
- ◆ Delta Sigma Phi Fraternity
- ◆ Gamma Sigma Sigma Sorority
- ◆ Phi Beta Lambda (PBL)
- ◆ Pi Lambda Phi
- ◆ Pi Delta Psi
- ◆ Zeta Phi Beta Sorority

You also may choose to work with your school's health center, nurses and/or peer health educators.

For more information about our relationships with these clubs and organizations and to learn about the local chapters in your area, contact Allison Hauser, Manager, National Youth Program, at the March of Dimes national office by e-mail at [ahauser@marchofdimes.com](mailto:ahauser@marchofdimes.com).

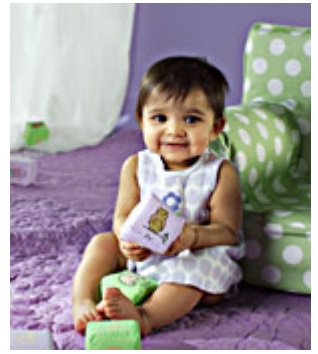


## REFERENCES

### March of Dimes Speaking Points

This presentation guide can help you prepare an effective introduction to the March of Dimes. Certainly, the amount and type of information you present will vary, depending on your audience and their level of interest. It is a good idea to practice your basic presentation and then be prepared with additional information, should questions arise. Ask your local March of Dimes office for copies of “About the March of Dimes” or other informational March of Dimes brochures.

- I. When talking about the March of Dimes, start with the mission.  
Who is the March of Dimes?
  - The mission of the March of Dimes is to improve the health of babies by preventing birth defects, premature birth and infant mortality.
  - The March of Dimes has nearly three million volunteers dedicated to saving babies by giving their time and their talent.
  - It is one of the largest voluntary health agencies in the nation and the premier advocate for the health of mothers and babies.
  - It was founded by Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1938 to defeat polio, which was accomplished with the development of the Salk and Sabin vaccines.
  
- II. Point out that the March of Dimes has a 70-year track record of success. The Foundation's extensive history of accomplishments has made a difference in the lives of millions. Ten scientists have received the Nobel Prize for work funded in part by the March of Dimes. You have been touched by the March of Dimes if:
  - You received a polio vaccine.
  - Your baby or a baby you know was cared for in a neonatal intensive care unit.
  - Your baby or a baby you know received lung surfactant therapy to treat respiratory distress syndrome.
  - You're aware that using alcohol, drugs and tobacco during pregnancy may cause serious birth defects.
  - You're aware that taking 400 micrograms of folic acid - before and during early pregnancy-- can help prevent up to 70 percent of neural tube defects, birth defects of the brain and spine known as neural tube defects.
  
- III. Emphasize that the March of Dimes fight to save babies' lives goes on. The March of Dimes:
  - Laid the groundwork for the first successful fetal surgery to correct a birth defect while the baby was still in the womb.
  - Is funding significant new research on genetic birth defects, lung and heart disease.
  - Has saved millions of babies from death or disability over the past six decades.
  
- IV. Emphasize that the March of Dimes has made the problem of premature birth an important priority. Here is some information about the importance of the Prematurity Campaign:
  - More than half a million babies are born prematurely each year—that's 1 in 8 babies.
  - More newborns die from premature birth than any other cause.
  - Premature babies who survive may face serious lifelong health problems.



- An alarming 30% increase in the rate of premature birth since 1983 has prompted the March of Dimes to launch a campaign to raise public awareness of the problem of premature birth and ultimately to find ways to reduce the incidence of premature birth.
  - In nearly half of premature births the cause is unknown.
  - On average charges for one infant with principal diagnosis prematurity is \$58,000-- compared to \$1,300-- a newborn without complications.
  - Through a variety of community programs, the March of Dimes helps women learn the warning signs of preterm labor and get the care they need to have a healthy pregnancy.
- V. Focus on volunteers as the backbone of the March of Dimes. Note that by working together, we can be successful in the fight to save babies. Each year, three million Americans volunteer their time and talent to help:
- Lead the Foundation on national and local boards.
  - Advocate for mothers and babies on national, state, and local levels.
  - Develop and implement programs, and provide vital services and education to help families have healthy babies.
  - Raise funds to support extensive March of Dimes research and programs.
- VI. Identify the March of Dimes as an important organization that is fiscally responsible and committed to the highest standards of excellence in management. The March of Dimes has:
- A solid reputation and a 69-year record of success.
  - Spends 77 percent of every dollar raised on programs that help to save babies' lives.
  - Donors and sponsors that raised \$252 in 2007.
- VII. Acknowledge that you have outlined a lot of information in a short period of time. The March of Dimes has many sources of additional information. Leave the Teen-2-Teen booklet and invite them to visit [marchofdimes.com/youth](http://marchofdimes.com/youth).
- VIII. Ask for Involvement. Ask them to join us in helping to give all babies a healthy start. Provide them with specific information regarding volunteer opportunities, such as chapter's standing committees, March for Babies and special event committees, etc. Be prepared to answer questions about how to get involved with your chapter or division, including local contact information.



## Sample Letter to School Administrators

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

The March of Dimes is proud to invite (SCHOOL) to participate in (EVENT) as part of Prematurity Awareness Month. (EVENT) will be held on (DATE) at (LOCATION). This event is organized by (MARCH OF DIMES VOLUNTEER GROUP), of which I am a member. We would like (SCHOOL) to get involved in this exciting project by (INCLUDE SHORT DESCRIPTION OF REQUEST).

During Prematurity Awareness Month, March of Dimes youth volunteers around the nation will participate in the organization and implementation of an activity or event centered around increasing awareness of premature birth. Each year more than half a million babies are born prematurely in the United States. In our state alone, (NUMBERS FROM PERI-STATS [marchofdimes.com/peristats](http://marchofdimes.com/peristats)) babies are born too soon, many with lifelong complications that can require special education services. Through the efforts of youth volunteers, we can educate people of all ages about the importance of a healthy lifestyle and the seriousness of premature birth.

The March of Dimes helps moms have full-term pregnancies and healthy babies. And if something goes wrong, we offer information and comfort to families. We research the problems that threaten babies and work on preventing them. The March of Dimes has a long history of fostering youth volunteerism and leadership at the local and national levels.

The members of (MARCH OF DIMES VOLUNTEER GROUP) at our high school, including myself, are conducting (EVENT) for Prematurity Awareness Month in (COMMUNITY). We ask you for your support, as well as that of the school, for the (EVENT) that these outstanding young volunteers are implementing to improve the health of the mothers and babies in their communities. Thank you for your consideration.

Together as Champions for Babies,  
(Name of volunteer attending the high school to which this letter is being sent).

Cc: (Superintendent of schools, March of Dimes Local Office)

## Sample Email to Friends & Family

Join me as I help the March of Dimes raise awareness about the problem of premature birth. In the United States today, 1 in 8 babies is born prematurely. More newborns die from premature birth than any other cause. And millions of children face serious health challenges or have trouble learning in school because they were born too soon. It's time for us to do more to help moms have healthy, full-term babies. To help us make progress in preventing premature birth go to [marchofdimes.com/petition](http://marchofdimes.com/petition) and sign the Petition for Premies. The number of people who sign can really make a difference. Remember — November is Prematurity Awareness Month.

P.S. Want to make an even bigger difference? Please forward this message to everyone you know who cares about babies. Tell them you signed the petition and ask them to join you!