

Joint Position Statement on Timing of Birth

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The 'Every Week Counts: Preterm Birth Prevention Collaborative', in partnership with the Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Alliance and the Stillbirth Centre of Research Excellence (CRE), are working closely together with health services, maternity care providers, consumers and researchers to reduce safely the rates of preterm birth and stillbirth.

The number of weeks in pregnancy when a baby is born is one of the most important factors in determining a person's future health. Most women (around 90%) have their baby at term between 37 and 42 weeks. It is well-known that being born before 37 weeks of pregnancy (preterm birth) can lead to a range of serious health problems. Less well understood is that early term birth (37 and 38 weeks of pregnancy) can also lead to adverse outcomes, including learning and behavioural problems at school age.

Preventing avoidable preterm birth and unnecessary early term birth, whether spontaneous or planned, has important health implications for children, their families,

and our community. It is also important to reduce the chance of avoidable stillbirth as this also has a huge impact on families.

There are many medical and pregnancy conditions where an early planned birth by induction of labour or Caesarean section is necessary and may be beneficial to the woman and her baby, and may prevent stillbirth. However, for most women planned birth can be delayed safely until 39 weeks or beyond, or to await spontaneous onset of labour. In the absence of an agreed reason for early planned birth, women should be encouraged to continue their pregnancy until 39 weeks or later to enable the baby to develop fully. Birth before this time cannot normally be justified for social reasons alone.

The decision-making process regarding timing of birth needs to be done as a partnership between the healthcare provider and the woman. This should be based on an appreciation of the relative benefits of early birth in reducing the risk of stillbirth, balanced against the risks of causing harm in childhood and later life.

This joint statement may be read together with additional information found below:

"Let's talk Timing of Birth" brochure - <https://stillbirthcre.org.au/about-us/our-work/the-safer-baby-bundle/timing-of-birth/>

The Stillbirth CRE and PSANZ position statement on Improving Decision-Making About Timing of Birth for Low-Risk Woman at Term - <https://stillbirthcre.org.au/about-us/our-work/the-safer-baby-bundle/timing-of-birth/>

'Every Week Counts' website - <https://everyweekcounts.com.au/>

Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Alliance website - <https://www.pretermalliance.com.au/>