

750,000 preterm babies die unnecessarily each year, UN reports

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The lives of at least 750,000 premature babies could be saved every year by taking simple and inexpensive steps to limit preterm birth, the world's largest killer of newborns, UN health experts said Friday.

"There are many interventions that can save lives and improve the quality of these [babies](#)' lives that are not high-skilled intensive care but that are simple interventions," said Elizabeth Mason, who heads the World Health Organization's Department of Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health.

Globally, 15 million children are born prematurely every year, representing one in 10 births, the WHO said.

Of this number, one million babies die every year, and countless others suffer lifelong physical, neurological or educational disabilities, Mason told reporters in Geneva, adding that the problem disproportionately affects poorer nations.

According to WHO statistics, more than 60 percent of preterm births occur in Africa and South Asia.

And while nine percent of babies are born too soon in higher-income countries, the number for poorer nations is 12 percent, the organisation said.

Mason cited straightforward steroid injections for mothers to prevent

babies born preterm, or before 37 weeks from conception.

Other precautions after babies are born were also important, she said, pointing out that skin-to-skin contact, for instance, was an excellent way of keeping premature babies warm—a problem for under-developed newborns.

Speaking ahead of World Prematurity Day on Saturday, Mason also called for a better understanding of resuscitation methods and the wider use of antibiotics to treat infant pneumonia.

"[Preterm babies](#) ... are more vulnerable to infection, they have more problems with breathing," Mason said.

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