

Study answers when moderate to late preterm babies go home

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"When is my baby going home?" is one of the first questions asked by families of infants admitted to the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). Now clinicians have a data-based answer. Moderate to late preterm babies (born at gestational age of 32 to 36 weeks) who have no significant medical problems on admission are likely to be discharged at 36 weeks of postmenstrual age (gestational age plus age since birth), according to a study published in the *American Journal of Perinatology*. Small for gestational age infants and those with specific diagnoses may stay longer.

"For the first time, practitioners have tangible data on length of stay to counsel parents at the time of their preterm baby's admission," says lead author Alanna Higgins Joyce, MD, MPH, a hospitalist at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. "Our results may decrease parent stress and help families prepare for their baby's arrival home."

Previously, length of stay predictors were signs of the infant's physiological maturity, which were only available near the end of the hospital stay. Infants born at less than 37 weeks of completed gestation comprise almost 10 percent of births in the United States. Most [preterm infants](#) are born between 32 and 36 weeks of gestation.

To establish a reliable length of stay estimate at the time of a preterm baby's admission, Dr. Higgins Joyce and colleagues from Lurie Children's conducted a retrospective chart review over six years, encompassing 3,240 moderate to late [preterm](#) infants born in a large, urban NICU. They found that the mean length of stay for these infants was 17 days, ranging from 30 days for infants born at 32 weeks of gestation to about a week for infants born at 36 weeks.

"While these results come from just our hospital, we hope other centers can confirm that many parents of premature [infants](#) can anticipate having their babies home with them earlier than previously expected," says senior author Patrick Myers, MD, neonatologist at Lurie Children's and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine.

More information: Alanna Higgins Joyce et al, When is My Baby Going Home? Moderate to Late Preterm Infants are Discharged at 36 Weeks Based on Admission Data, *American Journal of Perinatology* (2019). [DOI: 10.1055/s-0039-3401850](https://doi.org/10.1055/s-0039-3401850)

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